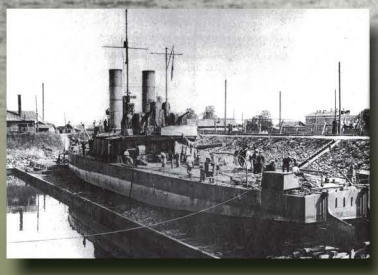
GUNBOATS OF WORLD WAR I



ANGUS KONSTAM

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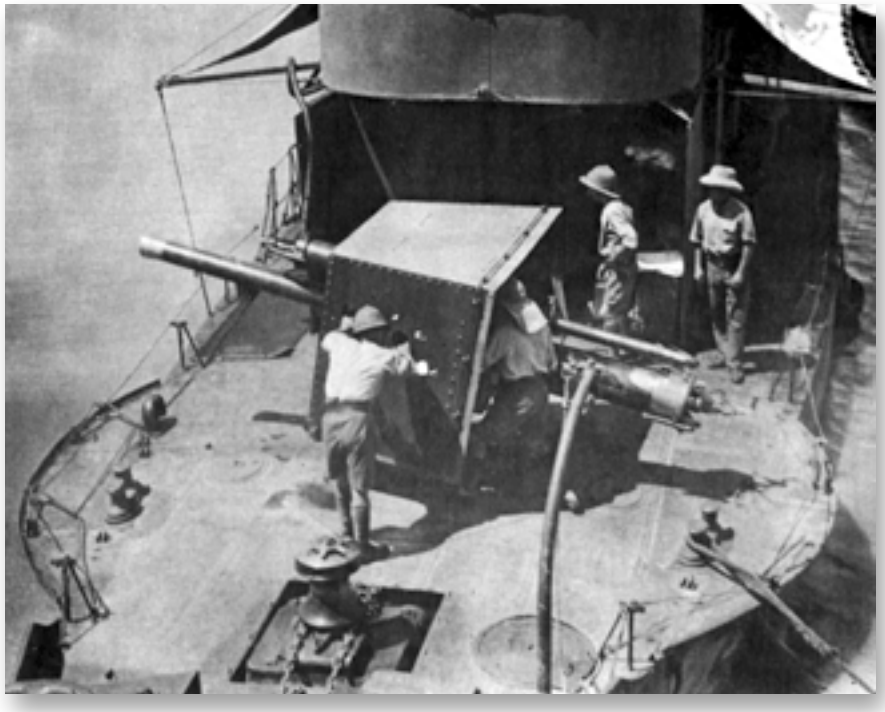
NEW VANGUARD 221

GUNBOATS OF WORLD WAR I



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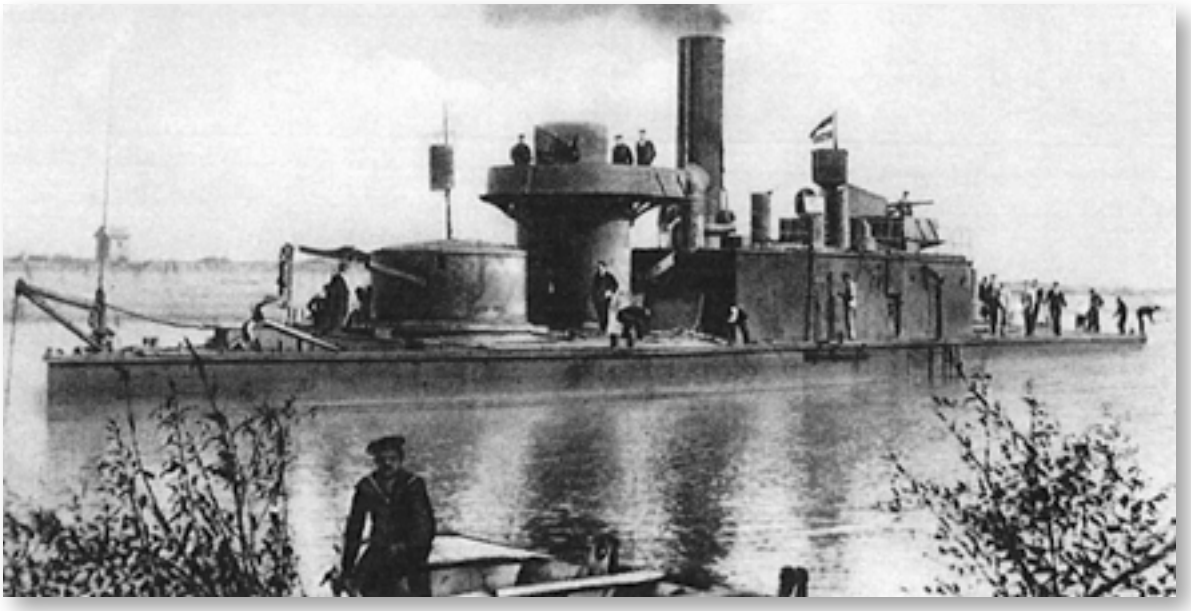
GUNBOATS OF WORLD WAR I

INTRODUCTION

It was official – the age of the gunboat had passed. In December 1904, with a few strokes of his pen, the First Sea Lord Sir John 'Jacky' Fisher decreed that the Royal Navy would scrap most of its large fleet of gunboats. It was a force he felt had become obsolete following the launch of HMS *Dreadnought*. Unable to protect themselves in this new age of steel, speed and firepower, these floating relics of a bygone era had become little more than a liability. As Fisher put it, these vessels were too weak to fight and too slow to run – collectively he called them 'a miser's hoard of junk'. Under Fisher, over 90 warships were disposed of, and the money and manpower spent on maintaining these vessels was diverted into the building and manning of new dreadnought battleships. The signal was clear – the Victorian fleet was no longer fit for purpose, and the modern Royal Navy would be leaner, fitter and far more powerful.

Despite this cull, the gunboat survived, and continued to play an important naval role during the years leading up to the outbreak of World War I. Just about every major naval power of the period had a few of them, and several



The Austro-Hungarian river monitor SMS *Körös* is pictured here during the campaign against Serbia, in 1914–15. In September 1914 she was instrumental in forcing a passage from the river Danube into its tributary the Sava, and then operated on the river in support of the Austrian army during the battle of Drina.

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other navies too. While Admiral Fisher was probably right when he argued that these vessels had become a liability, a few of them were still needed to protect national interests in far-flung corners of the world, to show the flag and to deter would-be aggressors, from local pirates to other rival powers. These gunboats came in a wide variety of types, from masted steam sloops to small river gunboats. They were joined by other strange craft – small monitors – whose large guns set them apart, even though they often performed an identical role to more conventional gunboats. This eclectic group of small warships may have been a relic of a bygone age, but in the right circumstances they were still powerful enough to make a difference.

In August 1914 many of these gunboats found themselves thrust into a war they were ill-prepared to fight. In the waters of the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, these small gunboats played a forgotten part in these opening months of war. Others took part in more sustained campaigns, particularly on rivers like the Danube and the Tigris, which snaked through regions split apart by war. Elsewhere, as far afield as Central Africa, northern Russia and the Aegean Sea, gunboats did what they could to influence the course of the war. While these little gunboats were small, vulnerable and often poorly armed, they were able to operate where more conventional warships were unable to venture, and could insert a considerable influence in the campaigns they participated in. Put more simply, these little gunboats punched above their weight. This then, is their story.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

Early Development

The term 'gunboat' has meant different things at different times. During the age of sail it was a small oar- or sail-powered craft, usually little bigger than a large ship's longboat. These vessels usually carried a single large gun in the bow, although larger gunboats were better armed, and could venture farther from the shore. Typically these operated from friendly ports, and would venture out to attack enemy warships, particularly when they were becalmed or vulnerable because of damage they had suffered. For instance, in October 1808 the 64-gun ship of the line HMS *Africa* was attacked off Malmo by a flotilla of Danish gunboats. The lack of wind gave the gunboats an immense advantage, and *Africa* would have struck her colours had she not been saved by the lack of daylight. Instead she limped away to safety during the night. A diorama showing the action in the Royal Danish Naval Museum reveals the tactics these gunboat commanders used – clustering themselves off the sailing warship's bow and stern, where they were safe from *Africa*'s powerful broadsides.

This was the kind of gunboat that remained in widespread use until the mid 19th century. Then the development of steam propulsion offered new possibilities, and ushered in a new and far more effective form of warship. During the 1840s three prototype gunboats were built for the Royal Navy and put through their paces. Their original role was to attack enemy naval bases, staying away from the main channels, and attacking them from shallow waters, which weren't covered by defensive gun batteries. The designers had the French port of Cherbourg in mind when these vessels were first designed, but instead the craft would have their baptism of fire in the Baltic and Black Seas, rather than off the French coast.

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This pre-1914 signed postcard shows the Austro-Hungarian river monitors of the Danube flotilla moored upstream of the old bridge spanning the Danube at Novi Sad, just beneath the Petrovaradin Fortress. A Temes-class monitor is in the foreground. The funnel recognition markings were painted over in July 1914, shortly before the outbreak of war.

During the Crimean War (1854–57) the marriage of a new generation of large long-range guns and these experimental screw-propelled gunboats led to the creation of the first purpose-built steam-powered gunboats. The first of these small craft entered service in 1854, and when these Arrow-class vessels proved too large for coastal operations they were followed by even shallower-draught craft. These little warships were used with great success in the littoral waters off the Finnish coast and in the shallow Sea of Azov. The bombardment of Kinburn in the Black Sea and Sveaborg in the Baltic would not have been possible were it not for these new shallow-draughted vessels.

Typical of these Crimean War gunboats was the *Jasper*, a Dapper-class wooden-hulled gunboat of 284 tons when fully armed and laden, with the ability to float in just 6½ft of water. *Jasper* arrived in the Sea of Azov in the summer of 1855 and busied herself attacking Russian shipping, landing men to raid coastal villages or food stores and taking part in the siege of Tagonorog. She ran aground on 24 July, thereby ending a brief but eventful career. She had only been launched in April. Like most of her sisters, *Jasper* carried two Lancaster-pattern smoothbore guns – a 32-pdr and a 68-pdr, the second and third heaviest guns used by the Royal Navy at the time. They were carried on the centreline behind the mainmast, and could both fire out onto either beam.

Jasper and her numerous sister ships formed part of a brand new gunboat fleet. The 12 British gunboats launched in 1854 were followed by 46 the following year, and an amazing 124 vessels in 1856. The end of the war meant an end in demand, and so only eight more gunboats were launched during the rest of the decade. More importantly, when the war ended the Royal Navy had to find a use for this new fleet of miniature warships. That was when gunboats began to embrace the role that they would excel at for the best part of half a century – providing the naval muscle behind the phrase 'gunboat diplomacy'.

These gunboats and the many similar craft that followed them would play an important part in upholding *Pax Britannica*. This was Great Britain's great

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age of imperialism, when almost a quarter of the globe was administered or governed by Britain, and her merchant ships dominated maritime trade throughout the globe. The Royal Navy had the job of protecting these sea lanes, and all the other naval tasks that came with the maintenance of empire. These included the suppression of slavery and piracy, the protection of British interests overseas, the maintenance of free trade and the safeguarding of Britain's overseas possessions. The low running cost of the gunboat, along with its relatively high degree of modern firepower and shallow draught, made it the ideal vessel to fulfil these important roles. Effectively for half a century the humble gunboat would become the maritime equivalent of the world's policeman.

During the late 1850s British gunboats were sent to the Far East to play their part in the Second Opium War (1856–60), a conflict fought to open China up to British merchants, and to maintain British control of the opium trade. The first gunboats arrived in Hong Kong in 1857, and for the next three years they proved their worth, destroying Chinese war junks, supporting land operations and bombarding enemy positions, such as the Taku forts protecting the seaborne approaches to Peking (Beijing). The gunboats used in China during this period were the veterans of the Crimean War. However, by the end of the decade a new breed of gunboat began to enter service – vessels designed specifically for this new role as guardian of *Pax Britannica*.

The Philomel-class gunboats produced from 1859–67, together with the Cormorant and Britomart classes, represented a new departure. For a start they were slightly larger than their Crimean predecessors, even though the Britomart class were described as 'improved Dappers', and the Philomels were based on the larger Algerine-class gunboats of the Crimean War. The Cormorant class though, were bigger, the idea being that they could carry double the armament of smaller gunboats, in a larger and more impressive hull. They were originally armed with two 68-pdrs and two 32-pdrs apiece, although their suite of weaponry changed slightly during their working lives.

Half a world away in North America another navy had been building gunboats in large numbers. During the American Civil War (1861–65) the US Navy built or converted a large number of steam-powered seagoing warships, which it used to enforce the blockade of Confederate ports, or to hunt down Confederate raiders on the high seas. The term 'gunboat' was often applied as a collective term to cover this disparate collection of warships, as their armament and role was similar to that of their British counterparts. More intriguing though was the development of 'river gunboats', designed to operate on the Mississippi river and its tributaries. Most of these vessels were powered by paddlewheels rather than screw propellers, a means of propulsion that was more practical in the confined and often difficult waters of these great rivers. While the use of river gunboats didn't outlast the war, the notion of gunboats that were purpose-built for use on rivers was one that would soon be resurrected.

In both Europe and the Americas the age of the ironclad had arrived, ushered in by the French *La Gloire* (1859), the British *Warrior* (1860) and the US *Monitor* (1861). While the leading maritime powers began building ironclad capital ships, at first this development had little impact on the lowly gunboat, or for that matter on the new class of cruiser, designed to protect or prowl the sea lanes. However, iron increasingly became the material of choice when it came to building the hulls of a new generation of Victorian gunboats.

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The HNLMS *Wodan* was one of a group of 16 small Wodan-class 'flat-iron' gunboats built by the Dutch during the late 1870s, to patrol the coastal waters and rivers of the Netherlands. She remained in service until 1924, and although playing no part in the war, she monitored German naval activity in Belgian coastal waters. In 1914 she was armed with a 28cm (11in) gun forward, and a 12cm (4.7in) gun aft. Larger Dutch gunboats spent the war protecting the waters of the Dutch East Indies.

This was a period of great transition in naval ship construction, armament and function, and after overcoming its conservative nature the British Admiralty began to recognise the value of iron hulls when it came to gunboats designed for overseas service. They were cheaper to maintain, immune to the ravages of shipworms and (most important of all) cheap to build.

In fact the Admiralty did experiment with armoured gunboats – the Vixen class laid down in 1864 was an attempt to combine the lines of a classic gunboat with the protection of an ironclad. They were found to be too slow and unseaworthy to function properly, and they were eventually towed over to Bermuda, where they ended their days as harbour tenders. Thus, their design contained a number of innovations. They were the first British gunboats to use a compound iron and wood construction, with timber hulls built over iron frames. This set the standard for the gunboats that followed them. One of them also used a form of water-jet propulsion – an idea ahead of its time, which proved as ingenious as it was impractical.

Just as innovative were the 'flat-iron' gunboats produced during the early 1870s, the result of a dead end in naval tactical doctrine. These were 'coastal gunboats', designed to operate in the English Channel, and whose strange appearance earned them their collective 'flat-iron' nickname. Two prototypes were built before the Ant class of coastal gunboats were commissioned in

The tiny gunboat HMS *Bustard* was one of the Ant-class of 'flat-iron' gunboats built in the early 1870s, and subsequently used as harbour vessels. *Bustard* was brought out of retirement in November 1914, and used to bombard German troops advancing within range of the Belgian coast.

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1870. These ludicrous-looking little craft were the forerunners of the light monitors of World War I, and were armed with a 10in muzzle-loading gun that seemed far too large for the small hull that carried it. Despite their impractical appearance several of these gunboats survived as gunnery training vessels and were still in service in 1914. They were duly refurbished and sent across the Channel to bombard the German-occupied coast of Belgium. This, strangely enough, makes them the oldest active gunboats to see service during World War I.

By the mid 1870s the design of the late-Victorian gunboat had been established. Although each subsequent class represented a minor variant on the vessels that preceded it, they all shared certain shared characteristics. These gunboats were ocean-going craft, and were usually fitted with three masts, although the emphasis on sail power as a means of augmenting steam propulsion was gradually falling into abeyance. A small battery of powerful guns was usually carried along the centreline of these vessels, which was capable of being fired out over either beam. Engines became increasingly more powerful, but most gunboats remained single-screwed ships, with a relatively slow speed of 10–14 knots. Like *Vixen* and her consorts they had composite hulls, with iron frames and wooden hull planking, although a few steel-hulled vessels were built from the mid 1880s onward. These craft – the Royal Navy's gunboats of the last decades of the Victorian era – were the ultimate tools of gunboat diplomacy, and served all over the globe, wherever Great Britain required a naval presence.

The world though, was a changing place. Since 1815 Britain had enjoyed an unquestioned naval mastery, and her ships dominated global trade. From the 1880s though, rival powers began to flex their own Imperial muscles, and establish overseas colonies. This coincided with an increase in the naval strength of several hitherto minor maritime powers such as the United States, Germany and France. While *Pax Britannica* would continue until the outbreak of World War I, other maritime powers began building their own gunboats, and deployed them to protect their overseas interests. While these rival maritime powers remained at peace with each other this increase in naval power posed no problem, but if a European war began then these gunboats would become enemies. This increasingly likely prospect played a major part in Admiral Fisher's decision to reduce the size of Britain's gunboat fleet. From that point on, the British gunboats that remained in service had

The patrol gunboat USS *Petrel* (PG2) entered service in 1889, and during the Spanish-American War she took part in the battle of Manila Bay (1898). After being damaged in a fire, she was decommissioned from 1901 to 1910, after which she resumed her duties as a gunboat, serving in the Caribbean. From 1917 on she served in the Pacific and the Atlantic, but was sold out of service after the war.

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to continue protecting British interest overseas, and to police the oceans, but they and their crews also had to prepare themselves for a global war, fought against one or more of Britain's European neighbours.

Pre-war Gunboats

In 1860 the Royal Navy had around 200 steam-powered gunboats in service, a few of which were powered by paddlewheel. In 1906, after Admiral Fisher's reduction of Britain's gunboat fleet, just 54 of them remained in service. This included 14 Ant-class 'flat-iron' gunboats and *Plucky*, a 'flat-iron prototype', all of which had long since stopped being used in a gunboat role. Six of these would be disposed of before the outbreak of war. Of the remaining 39 vessels, eight more would be sold out of service before 1910, while another would capsize when alongside in Hong Kong during a typhoon. That left just 30 gunboats, of which only ten remained on the active list in 1914. The rest had been re-assigned as supply or survey ships, harbour vessels or tenders. A few of those would be brought back into active service after the outbreak of war, but this didn't change the general picture – there were very few classic gunboats still remaining in the Royal Navy by the time the war broke out in August 1914.

The remaining ten active gunboats comprised three different classes of vessel. Four (*Bramble*, *Britomart*, *Thistle* and *Dwarf*) were Bramble-class gunboats built during the 1890s, but despite their age they were still perfectly capable of policing Britain's overseas empire – a role they had been specifically designed to perform. Of a similar vintage were the two Alert-class gunboats *Alert* and *Torch*, which served in the Middle East and the South Pacific. Four more modern gunboats (*Cadmus, Clio, Espiègle* and *Odin*) formed the Cadmus class, the last group of gunboats to enter service before Fisher's cuts. All of them had been laid down between 1900 and 1902, and they were expected to remain in service until the 1920s. This small collection of gunboats was all that remained of what had once been the most numerous type of warship in the Royal Navy. Soon they would be called upon to participate in a global conflict for which they were ill prepared.

In truth, the gunboat had been overtaken by events. Britain's global domination of maritime trade was now under threat from other nations, particularly the United States, and by the start of the 20th century other powers had begun to establish new overseas colonies, and therefore needed their own warships to protect their colonial interests. That meant they needed gunboats, many of which were more modern than the Victorian remnants of Britain's own gunboat fleet. For example, in the early 1880s the US Congress decided that they needed to modernise their fleet. The first vessel laid down in 1883 was one the US Navy officially labelled a 'despatch vessel', but which took the

One of the last of Britain's seagoing gunboats, HMS *Espiègle* was a Cadmus-class vessel, launched at Sheerness in late 1900. In November 1914 she saw action off the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab waterway in Mesopotamia, engaging shore batteries and Turkish gunboats and conducting naval bombardment missions. She later saw action during the defence of Basra.

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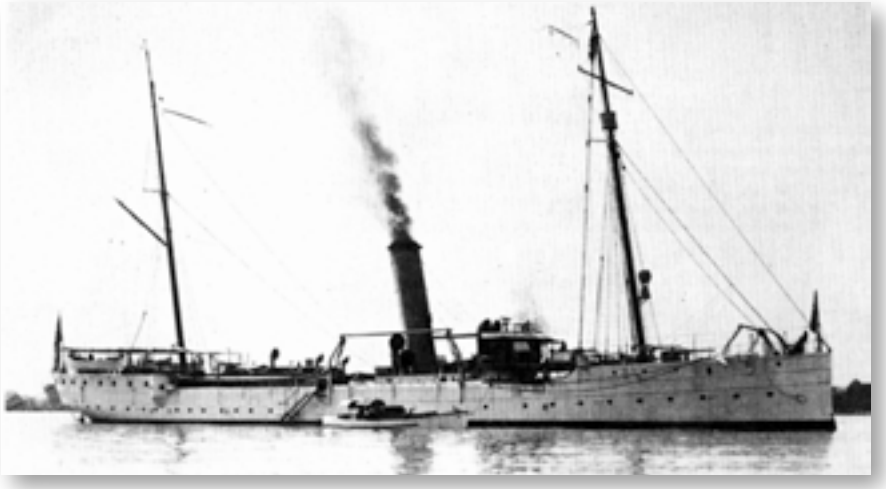

The gunboat and despatch vessel USS *Dolphin* played a major role in a dramatic gunboat-diplomacy incident in April 1914, when some of her crew were arrested by Mexican soldiers. The American outcry that resulted led to the temporary occupation of Vera Cruz. *Dolphin* spent the war based in Key West, Florida, patrolling the Florida Strait and Bahamas Channel.

form of a gunboat. The USS *Dolphin* entered service in 1885, and four years later she was joined by the first of three Yorktown-class gunboats – labelled 'patrol gunboats' by the US Navy.

Of these only the first – *Yorktown* – remained in active service in 1914, when she joined *Dolphin* patrolling in the Caribbean. These formed the start of a growing fleet of US Navy gunboats, built to protect America's interests in the Caribbean and the Far East. After the Spanish-American War (1898) the United States acquired new colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific, as well as a number of gunboats captured from the Spanish Navy. By 1914 the US Navy had almost twice as many gunboats in active service as the Royal Navy. To be fair, by then the British had re-examined the way they policed their overseas colonies, and a greater emphasis was placed on the use of light cruisers as gunboats on foreign stations. Not only were cruisers more powerful, they were also versatile, and so could be called upon to rejoin the main battle fleet in time of war.

The same approach was adopted by Imperial Germany, whose colonies in Africa and China required some form of naval protection. While she built several gunboats during the late 19th century, these were designed to fulfil the old gunboat role of coastal attack and defence, not the policing of overseas colonies. So, older German *avisos* (despatch boats) were deployed overseas, before the first purpose-built German gunboats entered service in 1898. Eventually six of these would be built for service in Chinese and African waters. Another important pre-war colonial power was the French Republic. By the end of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) the French had a sizeable fleet of steam-powered gunboats, but like those in German service these were coastal craft, designed to protect French ports and to attack enemy fortifications. It was only in the mid 1880s that the first purpose-built gunboats were built to protect French overseas colonies.

The Comète class of five composite gunboats – vessels similar to their British counterparts – were augmented in the late 1890s by more modern steel-hulled Surprise-class vessels. Unlike their predecessors, these three gunboats (*Surprise*, *Décidée* and *Zélée*) were still in service in 1914, serving in the waters around French Indochina, the Caribbean and the west coast of Africa. They were joined by the *Kersaint*, a larger steel-hulled vessel, which was earmarked for service in the Pacific. To support them the French also built a small flotilla

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This German 10.5cm (4.1in) SKL40 breech-loading gun was originally carried on the cruiser SMS *Königsberg*, but after her sinking it was transported across German East Africa and mounted on the forecastle of the auxiliary gunboat SMS *Graf von Götzen*. In this posed photograph taken in late 1915 the crew of the gunboat are practising gun drill while their vessel is berthed at Kigoma, on the shores of Lake Tanganyika.

of river gunboats, designed to operate on the rivers and coastal waters of French Indochina and China. Several of these were still in service when the war began, but none of them played a significant role in the conflict. Slightly more unusual were the small gunboats built for service on French rivers and canals. These were designed by the navy, but served with the French army, acting as mobile gun batteries on the Western Front.

Many other navies maintained gunboats in the years leading up to the outbreak of war in 1914. Essentially these can be divided into the three main groups mentioned above – ocean-going gunboats built to serve overseas, local defence craft charged with protecting the coast, and river gunboats whose main task was to support land operations. Strangely, as the need for the first category was declining, with cruisers taking on the role of colonial protection, the design of gunboats used in the other two categories was changing too, to reflect new developments in naval ordnance. Essentially this led to a degree of crossover between these two last categories, when the light monitor fulfilled both of these roles. Similarly a new breed of river gunboat appeared shortly before or during the war, and although these were usually designed for a particular purpose, like the French river gunboats of Indochina, wartime necessity meant that they were also called upon to serve in other theatres.

Another category of gunboats weren't really gunboats at all. The use of auxiliary warships had long been considered a viable way of augmenting the wartime cruiser fleet. This involved the arming of civilian steamers, passenger liners, fishing vessels or even yachts and launches, and pressing them into service as makeshift gunboats. The Imperial Germany Navy was particularly fond of this notion, and in time of war they planned to use vessels of this kind as commerce raiders. When World War I began the Germans deployed several of these auxiliary cruisers, ranging in size from the passenger liner *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* to the sailing ship *Seeadler*. Essentially though, these were commerce raiders rather than gunboats. However, the same policy led to the arming of civilian vessels for the defence of Germany's colonies in German East Africa, German West Africa and Tsingtao in China.

For instance, on Lake Tanganyika the German gunboats *Kingani*, *Hedwig von Wissmann* and *Graf van Götzen* were all converted civilian vessels, and they controlled the lake, serving as a maritime bulwark to the colony of German East Africa (now Tanzania). Incidentally, after being amalgamated into the fictitious German gunboat *Königin Luise*, they found immortality in the climax of the film *African Queen*. Indeed, the plot owed much to the events surrounding the battle for control of Lake Tanganyika in 1915. Similarly, in August 1914 a handful of small civilian vessels were pressed into service as makeshift gunboats for the defence of German West Africa. These included the former revenue cutter *Nachtigal* and the armed yacht *Herzogin Elizabeth*, both of which were sunk by the gunboat HMS *Dwarf* when defending the port of Douala.

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One of the first Fly-class river gunboats to arrive in Mesopotamia was HMS *Firefly*, pictured here in October 1915, before she joined the British advance up the river Tigris. She arrived in time to fire her guns in support of the British army during the battle of Ctesiphon outside Baghdad, but was put out of action and captured during the subsequent retreat from Ctesiphon to Kut. In this photograph her secondary 12-pdr gun has still to be mounted, and her main 4in gun lacks a gunshield, hence the makeshift protection surrounding the gun mounting.

Monitors and River Gunboats

The development of the monitor during the late 19th and early 20th century was not really a new phenomenon – these strange warships had a legacy that stretched back to the bomb vessels of the age of fighting sail. However, their more direct ancestor was the USS *Monitor* built in 1861 to counter the Confederate ironclad USS *Virginia*. Effectively a new ship type was created, which would evolve into a variant of the gunboat, designed for a specific kind of mission. Originally these vessels were used for coastal defence, as their low freeboard made them unsuitable for deep-water operations. During the last decades of the 19th century, 'breastwork monitors' were produced, with a slightly higher freeboard. The idea was that these could be used to attack enemy fortresses, the initial role of the steam gunboat.

Then the idea developed that monitors could be used to support land operations, firing their guns to assist troops on the shore, either from the bank of a river or the open sea. This became the genesis of a new breed of monitors – vessels that were gunboats in all but name. It was the Austro-Hungarians who pioneered the use of monitors of this kind in 1871, when they built a pair of river monitors based on the design of Union monitors of the previous decade. *Moros* and *Leitha* carried a pair of 6in guns, but these were found to be too heavy and were replaced by 4.7in pieces in the 1890s. These were specifically designed for operation on the river Danube, and formed the basis of what would become the Austro-Hungarian Empire's Danube Flotilla. By 1914 this flotilla had grown to eight monitors, in four

The three light monitors of the Humber-class were originally built for the Brazilian government, but were bought into British service shortly before the outbreak of war. These 6in monitors proved their worth off the coast of Belgium in 1914, and during the attack on SMS *Königsberg* in East Africa the following year.

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The first batch of M-class light monitors were all built on Teesside in 1915, and *M15* pictured here entered service in the summer of 1915. She was armed with a 9.5in gun, taken from an old armoured cruiser, with a smaller 12-pdr (7.6cm) gun mounted aft, in an open mounting. Like many of her sisters *M15* was called upon to fulfil the role of a gunboat when not being used as a monitor.

classes of two monitors apiece. The last of them entered service shortly before the commencement of hostilities against Serbia in 1914.

The river monitors were similar to contemporary river gunboats – the only thing that set them apart was the size of their armament. This, though, was about to change. The Royal Navy had built a number of river gunboats for service on the Yangtze and its tributaries, and during the war two new classes were produced, ostensibly for service in China, but which never reached the Far East until the end of hostilities. Instead they proved invaluable in the campaign in Mesopotamia, and were also employed off the Belgian coast and in the rivers of northern Russia. The first of these were simply dubbed 'China gunboats', but by the time the first of them entered service in 1915 they were known as Fly-class river gunboats. A total of 16 were built, and their main armament, a 4in quick-firing gun, was used to pound Turkish positions during the campaign up the river Tigris. At the same time another 12 'large China gunboats' were ordered, which evolved into the Insect class. These river gunboats carried two 6in guns, and performed well during the campaign in Mesopotamia. Interestingly, that made them every bit as powerful as the light monitors, which entered British service around the same time. The definitions of the two ship types had now overlapped so much that large gunboats and small monitors were virtually interchangeable.

A

SMS *KÖRÖS*

Designed by Austrian naval architect Josef Thiel, SMS *Körös* and her sister ship SMS *Szamos* were intended to guarantee Austro-Hungarian control of the river Danube in the event of a war in the Balkans. The first Austrian monitors to enter service for two decades, they were commissioned in 1893–94, and were based at Novi Sad, beneath the Petrovaradin Fortress, described as the 'Hapsburg Gibraltar'. *Körös* was built to engage enemy shore batteries, and her 5cm belt and 7.5cm turret armour was designed to withstand direct hits from most contemporary field guns. During the 1914–18 war though, *Körös* was badly damaged twice during duels with shore batteries.

SMS *BODROG*

In 1903–04 two Austro-Hungarian Temes-class river monitors were built in the Danubius riverside shipyard in Budapest. Essentially they were improved versions of the earlier Körös-class monitors, which were then ten years old. The Austrians maintained a rolling programme of building a pair of new river monitors every ten years. However, *Bodrog* and her sister ship *Temes* carried their main 12cm guns in two single turrets abreast of the bridge, which meant the craft could remain bows-on to the enemy when engaging them, thereby minimising the exposure of their hull. An unshielded 12cm gun aft was added to increase these vessels' ability to engage in indirect fire. *Bodrog* had the dubious honour of firing the opening shots of World War I.

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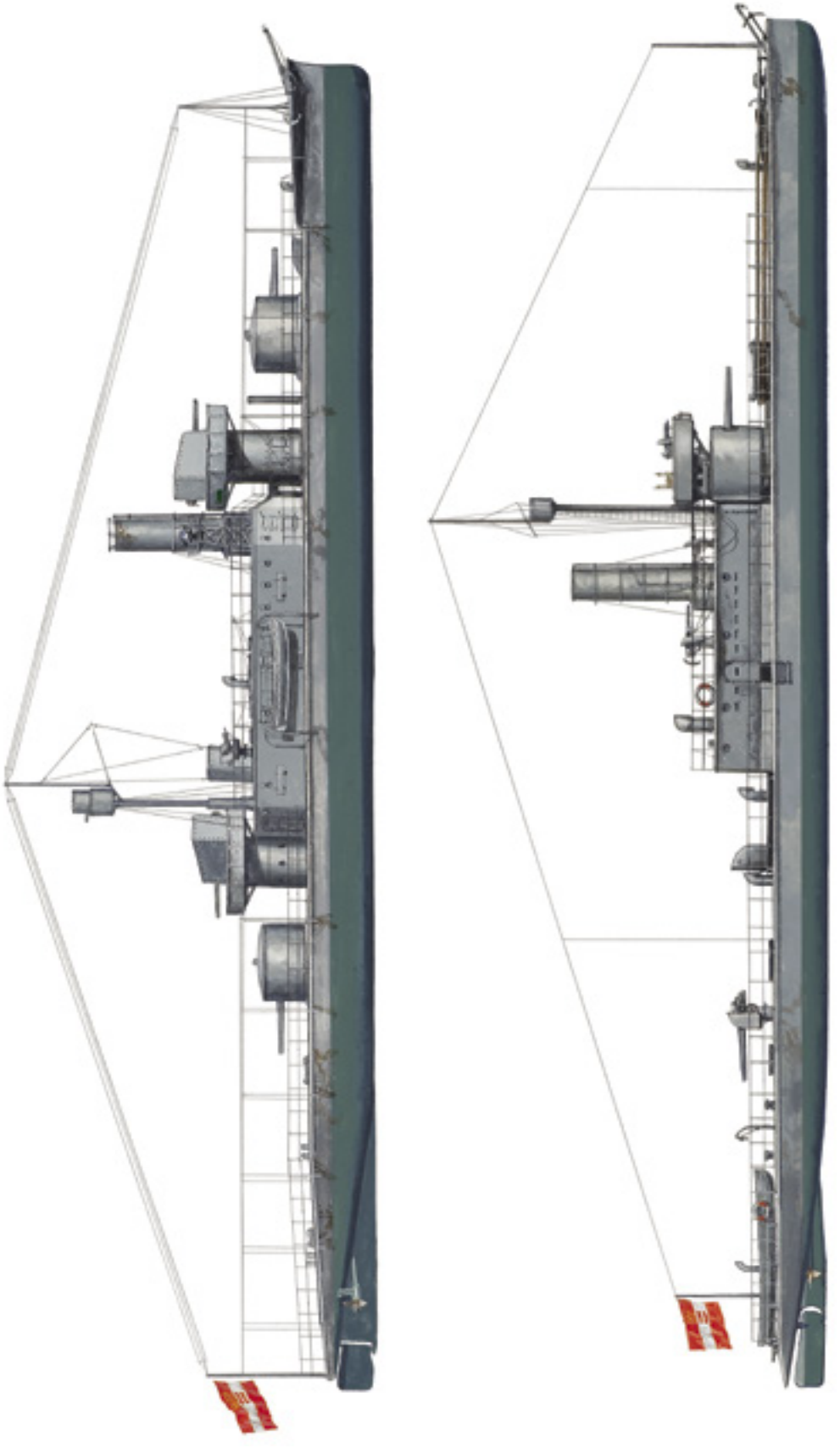

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The second batch of M-class light monitors all carried two 6in guns, produced in the Coventry Ordnance Works. *M30*, pictured here off the Aegean island of Mudros in October 1915, was used as a gunboat in Aegean waters until she was badly damaged in action off the Turkish port of Smyrna in May 1916. She was unable to limp back to her base at Mudros, and so had to be scuttled.

The first of these new monitors to enter service were actually river monitors, similar to those used on the Danube. Three of them were commissioned by the Brazilian government, and built in Britain. By then the Brazilians were unable to pay for them, so the three vessels were bought by the Admiralty shortly before the outbreak of war. They became the Humber class, and were armed with two 6in guns, mounted in a twin turret. These little monitors were found to be poorly suited to the open sea, but they proved useful enough to keep in service. So, as well as commissioning a wartime series of large gunboats mounting battleship-sized guns, the British also considered building a class of smaller monitors, to be used in support of planned amphibious landings on the German coast. While these plans never reached fruition, the 'M class' small monitors built to support the operation began to enter service during the summer and autumn of 1915.

The first M-class monitors carried a single 9.2in gun, taken from old cruisers. Despite the size of their main gun, these monitors had a draught of just 6ft, making them ideal for inshore operations or for service on rivers. Some of these guns were replaced by lighter 6in and 7.5in pieces, and a second batch of monitors (*M29* to *M33*) were designed to carry two 6in guns, mounted fore and aft, like the Insect-class gunboats being built at the same time. These vessels saw service off the Belgian coast and at Gallipoli, off the river Rufiji in East Africa and on the river Tigris, where they fought alongside Fly and Insect-class gunboats. So, while the Royal Navy began the war with a shortage of conventional gunboats, by the end of 1915 large numbers of well-armed small monitors and river gunboats had entered service, and were proving their effectiveness in Mesopotamia.

Other navies also built river gunboats and small monitors. The US Navy maintained a force of six monitors, most of which were maintained in reserve, although two – *Monadnock* and *Monterey* – saw service in Chinese waters before and during the war. The US Navy also built a pair of new river gunboats, for service on the Yangtse. Finally four Arkansas-class monitors entered service in 1902–03, and were earmarked for harbour defence, although by 1914 all of them had been relegated to other duties, such as serving as submarine tenders. Imperial Germany commissioned the river

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gunboat *Otter* in 1909, and she spent most of her brief career based in Tsingtao. She was interned by the Chinese following the outbreak of war. Similarly, the Imperial Japanese Navy maintained a small force of gunboats for service in Chinese waters.

The Imperial Russian Navy maintained a small force of gunboats in the Baltic, the Black Sea and the Far East, and in 1909 a pair of gunboats were built for service on the Caspian Sea. More interestingly they also built several classes of armoured river gunboats – eight of the Shkval class, and seven of the smaller Kalmyk class. The Shkval-class gunboats carried a pair of 6in guns, mounted in a twin turret, while the Kalmyks mounted a pair of single 4.7in guns. They were designed for service on the river Amur, which divides Russia from China. All of these were decommissioned in 1914 to release crew for more important elements of the fleet. They were subsequently brought back into service in the new Soviet Navy. Some of the world's smaller navies also employed small monitors, including Sweden and Brazil, while other colonial powers – the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain – maintained small flotillas of coastal or river gunboats to defend their overseas interests, as did China, Greece and Turkey. None of these played an active part in World War I.

The British light monitor *M33* took part in the fighting off Gallipoli and in the Aegean, and went on to participate in the river campaign against the Bolsheviks fought in northern Russia. She survived the war, and still exists today. She has been fully restored, and is now a historic museum vessel in Portsmouth, Hampshire, UK. The decommissioned light carrier *Illustrious* can be seen in the background.

So, the term 'gunboat' is one that embraces a number of different types of warship. The seagoing gunboats employed by the Royal Navy, the US Navy, Imperial Germany and others were vessels that were maintained to carry out the task of protecting national interests overseas, and were capable of being sent to potential trouble spots if the situation demanded. Next came the smaller group of coastal gunboats, whose range and armament was often limited, and whose main role was either the protection of harbours, or serving as patrol boats in coastal waters. Due to their role these vessels weren't destined to play

Like all of her M-class counterparts, *M33* was built according to mercantile rather than naval standards, which meant she was far less solidly constructed than other naval vessels. This was deemed a necessary expedient, as speed of construction was considered of paramount importance during the spring and summer of 1915.

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In late 1918, the Insect-class gunboats *Aphis* and *Ladybird* were sent to the Danube to represent the Allies in the post-war peace negotiations. This photograph shows *Aphis* tied up alongside the right bank of the Danube, below the Chain Bridge. The parliament building can be seen on the far bank. For service on the Danube the gunboats were painted green, and had their topmasts removed so they could negotiate the river's bridges.

a significant part in the war. River gunboats came in a range of sizes and had widely varying capabilities, but the largest of these would provide invaluable support in military campaigns. Other river vessels used to patrol borders or colonial rivers saw little or no active service during the conflict.

Slightly more significant were the handful of makeshift gunboats converted from civilian craft in order to protect exposed overseas possessions. Finally there were the light monitors, designed to fire in support of troops ashore, or to bombard enemy strongholds. Some of these were seagoing warships, while others were river monitors, but both shared the same characteristics of a heavy armament and a shallow draught, which meant they could venture into waters that were beyond the reach of more conventional vessels.

Despite this range of gunboat types, they all shared one of two basic functions, and in some cases the roles overlapped. These were the defence of national possessions, usually overseas colonies and outposts, and the bombardment of shore targets in support of land operations fought close to rivers or coastal waters. Gunboats were warships that punched above their weight, making their presence felt in remote theatres of war, and performing tasks that other larger vessels were unable to. Collectively they played a valuable yet largely unsung part in the unfolding drama of 'the war to end all wars'. Without them, the final outcome might not have been altered, but the war might have taken a decidedly different course.

COMBAT POTENTIAL

The sheer range of gunboats of this period makes it hard to quantify their collective fighting abilities. However, by looking at the gunboats that played an active part in the war, and examining their weaponry, we can understand more about how effective they were in doing their job. For the most part, the largest guns carried in World War I gunboats were 4–6in (10–15cm) weapons. These were usually supported by a range of lighter weapons – 12-pdrs (76mm), 6-pdrs (57mm), 3-pdrs (47mm), 2-pdrs (40mm) and machine guns. While these smaller weapons were largely provided for vessel defence or anti-aircraft protection, the larger guns constituted these gunboats' real offensive power – weapons capable of pounding enemy positions ashore.

Main Armament

The British Cadmus-class gunboats carried a 4in/40 QF Mark III gun – the 'QF' standing for 'Quick Firing'. These were breech-loading weapons, and weighed 1.3 tons apiece. Cadmus-class gunboats carried six of these guns, in paired mountings fore, aft and amidships, so that three guns could fire onto each broadside. Gunboats of the Bramble class carried two of these weapons,

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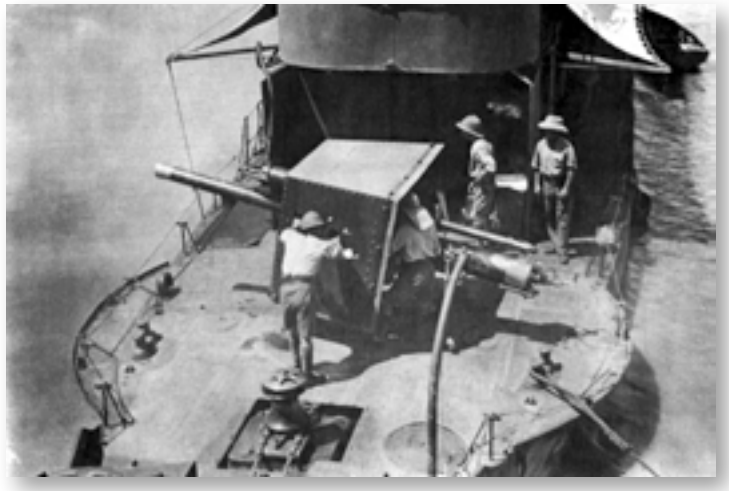
mounted fore and aft of the superstructure, on the vessel's centreline. They were all protected by gunshields, which effectively formed open-backed turrets. These 4in (10.2cm) guns had a range of 7,700 yards (7,000m) and fired a high-explosive shell. The same type of gun was mounted on the foredeck of British Fly-class river gunboats. This meant they had a range of around 4.3 land miles when firing in support of troops, or 3.85 nautical miles when engaging targets afloat or on shore.



This detailed picture of the 4in gun mounted on the foredeck of the Fly-class gunboat HMS *Sedgefly*, taken in September 1917, shows just how exposed the mounting was. Its thin metal barely protected the gunlayers – the rest of the crew were fully exposed to fire from the shore.

These British guns were broadly comparable to the German 10.5cm (4.1in) gun carried in the Iltis-class gunboat, or on the improvised gunboat *Graf von Götzen* operating on Lake Tanganyika. The main difference was that the German gun had a greater range (13,340 yards or 12,200m), and the ocean-going gunboats were supplied with armour-piercing as well as high-explosive shells. The 4in/40 gun mounted on many US Navy gunboats was a similar weapon, with a range of 11,500 yards (10,520m) and a choice of both types of ammunition. All of these guns – British, German or American – had a rate of fire of approximately eight rounds per minute.

Of course, monitors were characterised by their large guns. Those carried on Austro-Hungarian vessels were relatively small – 4.7in (12cm)/50 Skoda guns. Range was limited due to the constrained elevation of the Skoda turrets fitted to these monitors, but 14,000 yards (13,176m) was attainable. With a rate of fire of ten to 12 rounds a minute, a shell weight of 45lb (20kg) and a range of armour-piercing, semi-armour-piercing, high-explosive and shrapnel rounds, this gun was well suited to its role of fire support.

This, though, was a relatively light weapon, compared to the 6in (15cm) guns carried on the smallest British M-class and Humber-class monitors, as well as Insect-class river gunboats. Although bore and calibre remained the same, different types of vessels carried different variants and calibres of these guns. Monitors *M29* to *M33* carried a pair of Mark XII/45 6in guns, while

The British Insect-class gunboat HMS *Mantis*, pictured on her way home from Mesopotamia in 1918. She had her 6in guns removed for the voyage to improve her seakeeping qualities for the voyage to Suez. She was towed home from there. Of interest is the extra steel protection fitted around her battery deck, behind her funnels, with firing ports for her machine guns.

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The forward 6in gun of a British Insect-class river gunboat, conducting a bombardment during the advance up the river Tigris towards Kut in February 1917. This vessel was either *Mantis*, *Moth* or *Tarantula*, the only three gunboats of their class to take part in the operation.

strangely their counterparts of the Humber class carried a mixture of 50-calibre weapons – a Mark XIV barrel on the right, and a Mark XV on the left. These were guns that were initially designed for the Brazilian Navy. The Humber class had a limited range, thanks to the limited elevation of their guns. Their maximum range was just 14,130 yards (12,920m) at an elevation of 15 degrees. The more versatile Mark XII mounting on the later M-class monitors gave these 6in guns an impressive range of 23,770 yards (21,735m) at 30 degrees of elevation. This meant they could hit targets up to 13½ miles inland. Typically they carried 125 standard shells, as well as 125 high-explosive and 25 shrapnel rounds. This made these monitors extremely potent floating gun batteries.

The Insect-class gunboats mounted older Mark I or Mark II versions of the 6in/40 gun. These had a far more limited range of just 10,000 yards (9,140m) at 15 degrees of elevation, firing common and high-explosive shells. However, the simpler mechanism of these older gun mountings meant that the Insect-class monitors could fire an average of six rounds a minute, as opposed to four from the 6in monitors. The 6in/30 guns carried by the larger US gunboats such as *Dolphin* and *Yorktown* were very similar to these British guns in terms of power and mechanism, but superior mountings and a greater freedom of elevation gave them a greater range – around 18,000 yards (16,460m).

A few of Britain's small monitors had even larger guns. The first 14 of the 19 M-class monitors to enter service were designed to carry obsolete 9.2in (23.4cm) guns, culled from Edgar-class protected cruisers, which were refitted with 6in guns. These, plus a few spares held for the Drake and Cressy classes

B

SMS *ENNS*

The last pair of Austro-Hungarian river monitors to enter service before the war began were the two Enns-class vessels *Enns* and *Inn*. Both monitors were commissioned in 1914, having been built in Lintz. This time their main 12cm guns were mounted in a twin turret installed on the foredeck, with a single 12cm turret located aft, on the quarterdeck. This gave them a powerful broadside capability, while matching the ability of the Temes-class to fire forward over the bow. *Enns* participated in the bombardment of Belgrade in October 1915, but was badly battered during the exchange of fire. She went on to serve in the Austro-Hungarian campaign against Romania.

SMS *GRAF VON GÖTZEN*

Named after the former governor of German East Africa, *Graf von Götzen* was built in Germany in 1913, and transported in pieces to Lake Tanganyika, which formed the western boundary of the German colony. There she was reassembled at Kigoma, and was launched on the lake in February 1915. Although she was originally designed as a lake freighter, she now found herself serving as an auxiliary gunboat. She was fitted with a 10.5cm gun taken from the German cruiser SMS *Königsberg*, and served as the flagship of the German flotilla that dominated the lake for a year, until the sinking or capture of two smaller German gunboats by a pair of British motor launches. In June 1916 *Graf von Götzen* was damaged in an air attack by Belgian floatplanes, and she was scuttled six weeks later, when Kigoma was about to be captured by Allied troops. The gunboat was subsequently raised, and she remains afloat today, serving as the passenger ferry MV *Liemba*.

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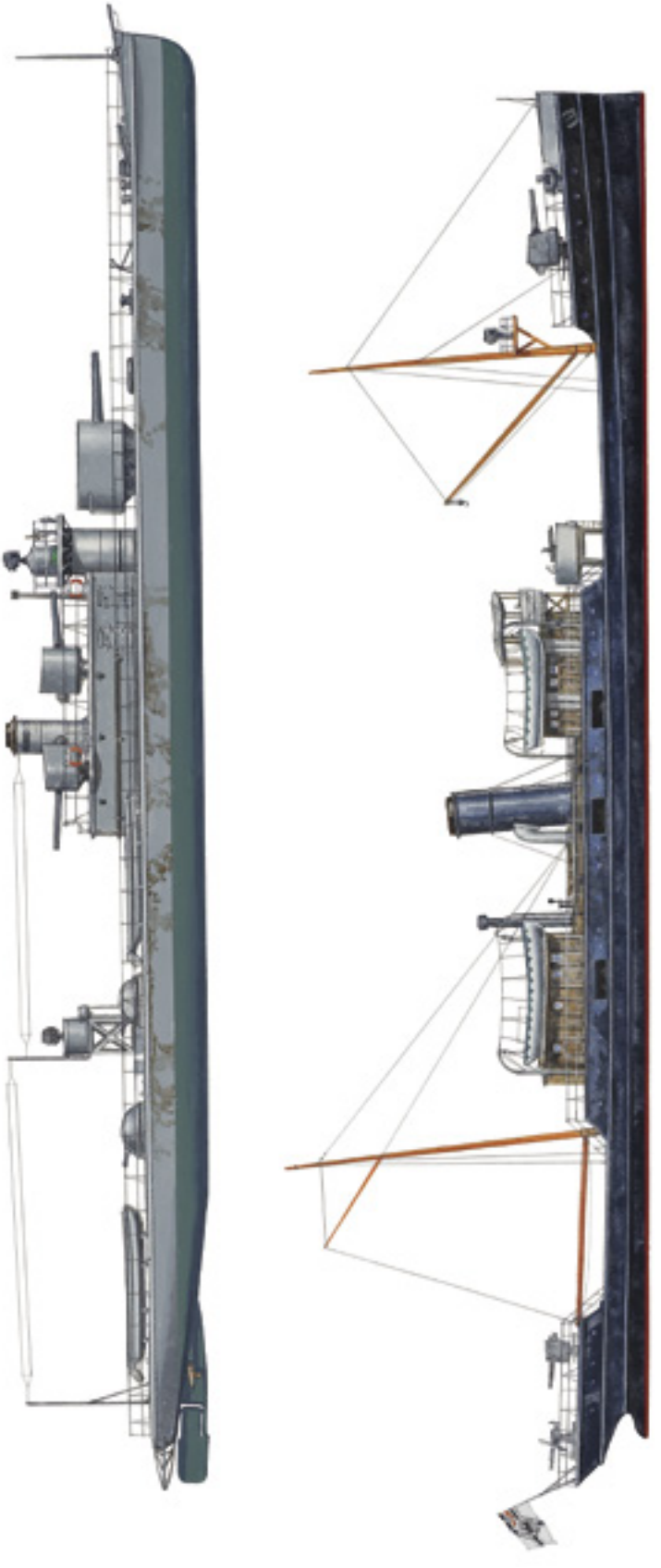

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When HMS *Cricket* arrived in Archangel in late 1918 she had her gunshields removed so her guns could elevate far enough to engage aircraft, which were perceived as an important threat in northern Russia. The following spring she was badly damaged during a duel with a Bolshevik shore battery, and was driven aground. She was eventually towed to safety and repaired.

of armoured cruiser, provided the main armament of the first batch of M-class monitors, with each vessel carrying a single 9.2in gun. However, the guns from the Edgar-class vessels were less powerful than the four stockpiled for the armoured cruisers. So, while the newer Mark X guns had a range of 25,700 yards (23,500m), the older lower-velocity Mark VI pieces only managed a maximum range of 16,664 yards (15,240m).

The trouble was, these guns weighed between 22 and 28 tons – the modern guns being heavier – and due to the resultantly high centre of gravity of the monitors they proved to be unstable gun platforms in any kind of swell. So, in 1915 *M24* and *M25* were given 7.5in/50 guns instead, taken from a Swiftsure-class pre-dreadnought battleship. Similar 7.5in guns were fitted to *M21* and *M25* before they entered service. These guns had a maximum range of 14,328 yards (13,100m). As no more of these guns were available, *M26* and *M27* received 6in/40 guns, similar to those provided for Insect-class gunboats. So, of the first batch of M-class monitors to enter service, *M15* to *M20*, plus *M22* and *M28* carried their original 9.2in guns, *M21* and *M23* to *M25* carried 7.5in pieces, while *M26* and *M27* were fitted with 6in guns. All these guns were carried in a single fully enclosed turret mounted on the foredeck.

The second batch of M-class monitors carried two 6in/45 Mark XII BL guns, each mounted in one of these open-backed turrets. While these monitors were unprotected, their gunshields were 6in (15cm) thick. The guns had an average rate of fire of four rounds per minute.

Finally, the second batch of small monitors – *M29* to *M33* – all carried two 6in guns, mounted in single open-backed turrets fore and aft of the superstructure. This second batch proved much more successful than the first group of monitors, in terms of stability, ship handling and accuracy of fire. So, while several of them, together with a few of the 6in and 7.5in monitors, served as gunboats in the Black Sea, the Aegean and the White Sea, or after the war in the rivers of northern Russia, the larger 9.2in small monitors were not regarded as being versatile enough to function in any other role, apart from as a floating gun battery.

It is worth re-emphasising that with the exception of ocean-going gunboats, the main armament of these little warships was designed for 'shore bombardment' rather than the fighting of surface actions. Despite the term, this involved engaging targets up to the full range of the guns, at targets beyond

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the line of sight of the gunboat. Fire was therefore directed by fire-control officers on shore rather than from the bridge of the vessel itself. Normally this was carried out by means of radio, linking the gunboat's bridge with a naval gunnery support team on shore, but communications could also be undertaken by means of heliograph or signal flags. If available, field-telephone lines or spotter aircraft were used to help correct the fall of shot.

During the attack on the German light cruiser SMS *Königsberg* on the river Rufuji in East Africa, Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) seaplanes were used to direct the fire of the light monitors *Severn* and *Mersey*. This, though, was still such a new development that before the attack the airmen and gunners had to practise communicating with each other, and to overcome the inherent unreliability of contemporary airborne radio sets. Interestingly, the German cruiser returned fire by means of a fire-control officer hidden on the banks of the river close to the British monitors, using a field-telephone link.

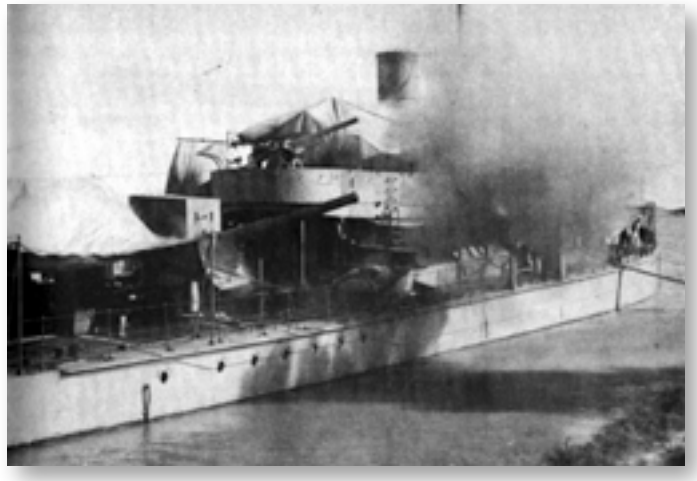
With the exception of the German Iltis class, the British Cadmus class and the American Yorktown or Nashville classes of ocean-going gunboats, in 1914 these vessels lacked the modern rangefinding and fire-control equipment needed to effectively engage other surface ships. Instead, gunnery within line of sight was controlled in a more antiquated way using binoculars, compass bearings and the skill of the gunlayer. All gunboats had some form of spotting position, usually at a masthead, or failing that the bridge was used. A plotting or transmission station behind or below the bridge was used to analyse the range and bearing information gathered, and pass this on to the gun crews. As the war progressed rangefinders were fitted, and the whole process became slightly more sophisticated, with information repeaters and switchboards being fitted to coordinate the fire of the gunboat's main guns. Smaller weapons continued to function under local fire control.

The Austro-Hungarian gunboat *Temes* – sister ship of *Bodrog* – pictured at her moorings near Loznica (Loznitsa) on the river Sava in September 1914, while her crew conduct maintenance and cleaning. *Temes* was sunk in late October 1914 after hitting a mine farther up the river Sava, but she was raised, repaired and returned to active service in 1917.

This Insect-class gunboat bombarding Turkish positions from the left bank of the river Tigris shows how these vessels conducted their bombardment missions: secured to the bank, and using both 6in and 12-pdr (3in) guns. An officer behind the after 12-pdr is holding binoculars, presumably to identify signals sent from the gunnery observation team operating on shore.

Smaller Weapons

The very role of the gunboat meant that these vessels often had to range close inshore to carry out their mission, or operate close to enemy-held riverbanks or shorelines. This meant that they had to be able to defend themselves, whether the threat came from hostile shore batteries, enemy troop formations or hostile insurgents. Most colonial powers had experience dealing with this last threat, particularly the Royal Navy, whose ocean-going gunboats had frequently become involved in small actions of this kind while fulfilling their role as Imperial policemen. What



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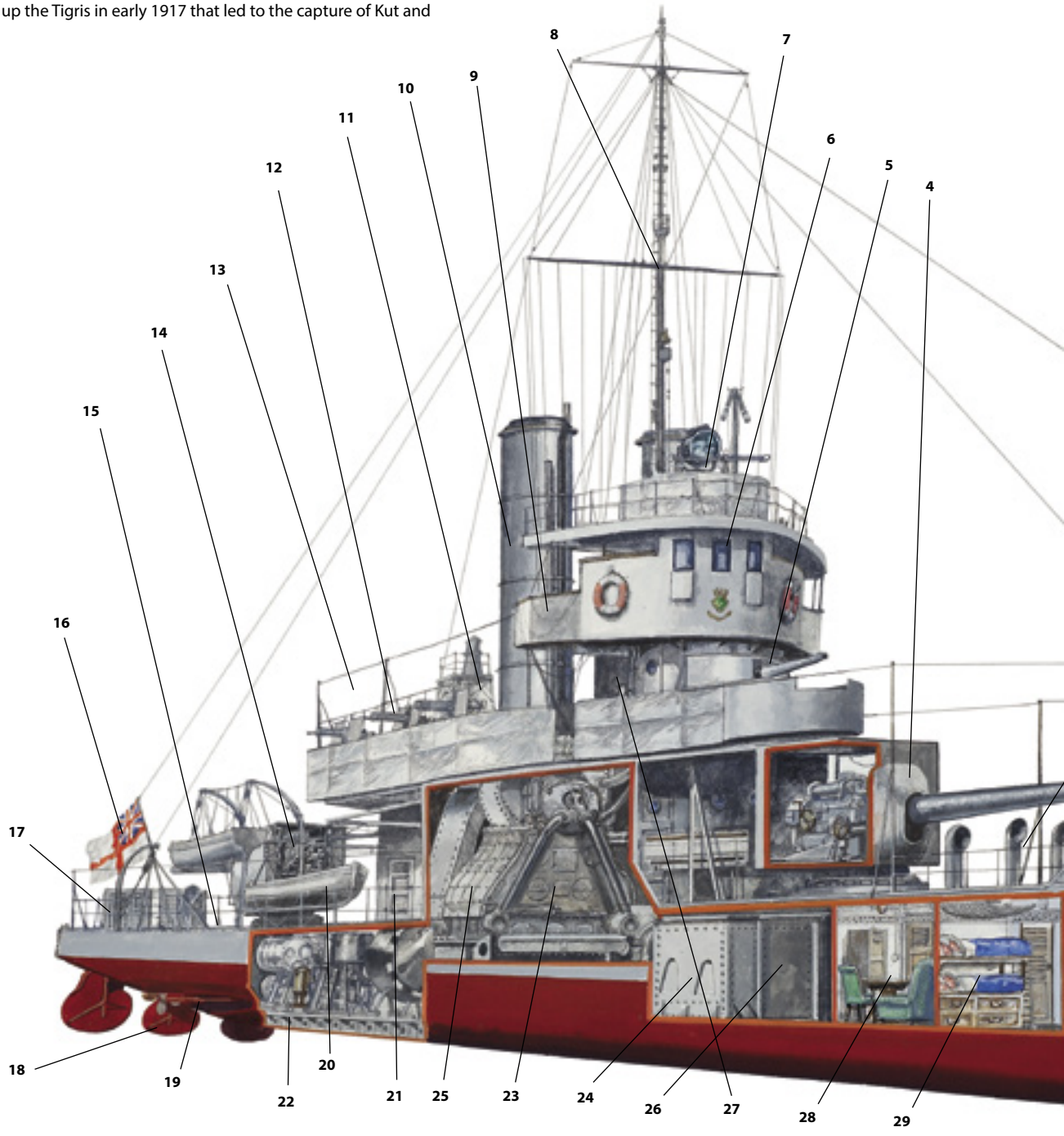
C HMS *MOTH*, INSECT-CLASS RIVER GUNBOAT

After commissionings the 'large China gunboat' HMS *Moth* was towed to the Persian Gulf, and she joined the Tigris flotilla in the summer of 1916. Under the command of Lieutenant-Commander Cartwright she participated in the British offensive up the Tigris in early 1917 that led to the capture of Kut and Baghdad. In June 1919 she arrived in Archangel, and operated on the river Dvina in northern Russia until the withdrawal of the Allied expedition at the end of the year. She subsequently served on the China Station until her loss in late 1941.



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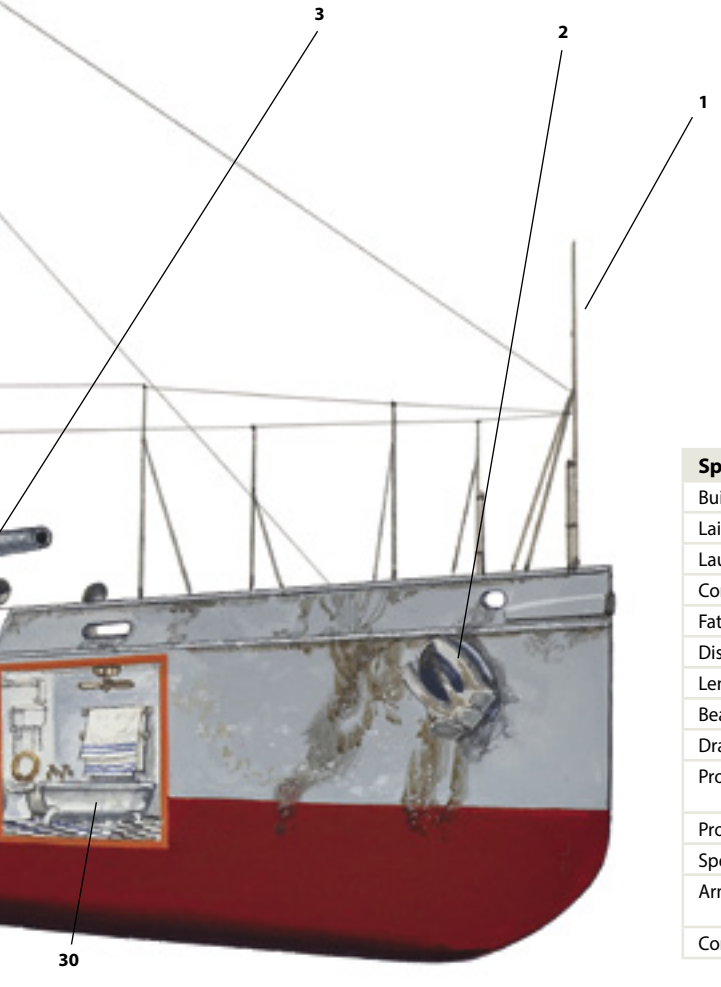
KEY

1. Jackstaff
2. Bow anchor (one of two)
3. Ventilators
4. Forward 6in /40 Mark VII BL gun
5. Forward 12-pdr gun
6. Bridge
7. Searchlight platform and fire-control position
8. Mainmast
9. Bridge wing
10. Funnel
11. Wireless cabin
12. Machine gun battery (three on each broadside)
13. After 12-pdr (not visible behind superstructure)
14. After 6in /40 Mark VII BL gun
15. Quarterdeck
16. Ensign staff
17. Crews' heads
18. Rudder (one of three)
19. Propeller shaft (starboard)
20. Boat deck
21. Senior rates' mess
22. Double hull
23. Turbine room
24. Boiler room
25. Exhaust vents
26. Forward magazine
27. Wardroom
28. Captain's cabin
29. Officers' cabin
30. Officers' heads



Specifications	
Builder	Sunderland Shipbuilding Company, river Wear
Laid Down	March 1915
Launched	9 October 1915
Commissioned	5 January 1916
Fate	Scuttled in Hong Kong harbour, 12 December 1941
Displacement	625 tons (standard), 645 tons (fully laden)
Length	237ft 6in (72.4m)
Beam	36ft (11m)
Draught	4ft (1.2m)
Propulsion	Two Yarrow boilers, two expansion turbines, generating 2,000shp
Propeller shafts	Two
Speed	14 knots
Armament	Two 6in/40 Mark VII BL guns in single mounts, two 12-pdrs in single mounts, six Vickers machine guns
Complement	53–55 officers and men

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The secondary armament of the Austro-Hungarian Temes-class river monitor consisted of a pair of these Skoda 3.7cm QF guns, mounted on the battery deck beside the funnel. They were mounted so that they could be fired to either beam – the one pictured here was the forward port-side gun of SMS *Bodrog*.

wasn't really expected of them was to have to engage other small warships, although after the outbreak of war this became a real possibility, from enemy gunboats, armed merchant ships, torpedo boats or gun-armed launches. As the war progressed the possibility of attack from the air became increasingly likely, and so in some cases additional anti-aircraft protection was fitted.

The secondary armament of gunboats of this period was as varied as the appearance of the gunboats themselves. Traditionally, Victorian gunboats were armed with small secondary pieces to deter attacks by local insurgents, whether attacking by boat or storming a quayside. This meant that small QF guns ranging from 3-pdrs to 12-pdrs were carried, which could fire high-explosive shells, and had a rapid rate of fire of around 12 to 20 rounds a minute. The larger 12-pdrs – the equivalent of 7.6cm or 3in guns – were usually supplied with a range of ammunition, including shrapnel, high-explosive and semi-armour-piercing rounds. Most of these mounts could be used for anti-aircraft defence as well as engaging shore targets, if the elevation of the mounting permitted. For instance, the Hotchkiss 6-pdr (2.25in or 5.7cm) was widely used by the world's navies at this time, and while a low-velocity weapon, it proved just as useful as an anti-aircraft gun as it was an effective surface weapon.

The 7.5cm Skoda guns mounted in Austro-Hungarian river monitors were equally effective, but lacked the elevation needed to engage aircraft. In the Temes class that task was left to the 3.7cm Skoda gun – the equivalent of a Hotchkiss 3-pdr in terms of range, firepower and effectiveness. The elegant Hotchkiss 3.7cm revolving cannon used in German gunboats was a different weapon entirely. It was fed by a magazine holding eight rounds, and was operated by means of a hand crank. It had a rate of fire of 15 aimed rounds a minute, and a range of up to 4,000 yards (3,658m). The revolving cannon fired a 1lb high-explosive shell, and was equally effective against enemy torpedo boats or troops on shore. The Maxim-Nordenfelt or Vickers 1-pdr 'pom-pom' (nicknamed after the sound it made when fired) was a similar weapon, but was belt fed, and could be used to engage both surface targets and aircraft. It led to the development of a larger 2-pdr 'pom-pom', which

The patrol gunboat USS *Wilmington* and her sister ship *Helena* entered service in 1897, and were earmarked for service on the river Yangtse. *Wilmington* saw service during the Spanish-American War (1898) before joining the Asiatic Squadron, and after the United States' entry into World War I she patrolled the waters of the Philippines. She is typical of the larger American gunboats of this period.

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HMS *Ladybird*, pictured entering Port Said in Egypt during the spring of 1917. She and her sister ship *Aphis* spent the year operating off the coast of Palestine, providing General Allenby's army with naval gunfire support during its advance towards Damascus. Note the recognition markings around her funnel – a feature of the vessels operating in the Eastern Mediterranean.

was introduced into British service in 1915, and mounted in the Royal Navy's Fly-class river gunboats.

Finally, most gunboats and small monitors of whatever size or shape carried one or more machine guns. For the most part these were Maxim guns, or Schwarzlose, Colt or Vickers variants. These fired a .303in (7.7mm) bullet, and were fed by 250-round canvas belts, giving a rate of fire of up to 500 rounds per minute. Like the other light guns carried on gunboats of this period, if properly mounted they could be used to fire at aircraft as well as surface targets.

The final 'weapons system' carried on board these gunboats was the sailors themselves. The Victorian era had been one where the use of naval landing parties had become an extension of gunboat diplomacy. While the scope for this kind of warfare was limited, or even unnecessary when operating with troops ashore, gunboats of all nationalities were still equipped with sufficient small arms – and in some cases cutlasses – to be able to send sailors ashore. They were used in traditional gunboat roles of providing protection for national interests or citizens ashore, and in other situations when the gunboat was moored or berthed alongside a quayside or riverbank they could provide a shore guard to cover the approaches to the berth. If required, the firepower of these landing parties could be augmented by the landing of machine guns or smaller pieces of ordnance, such as 3-pdr guns.

Taken as a whole, ocean-going gunboats were well equipped for the pre-war job they had to do. While this might have proved inadequate in wartime, these vessels were rarely called upon to engage more powerful warships. Instead, their old peacetime role evolved into a wartime one that was little different, and so these warships proved themselves perfectly capable of performing the tasks assigned to them. The same was usually true of river gunboats or small monitors. While they tended to be provided with a wider range

Two Fly-class gunboats, lying at anchor on the river Tigris during the winter of 1916–17. The turret gunshields of their 4in guns have been removed, in an attempt to increase the elevation of the guns, and thereby increasing their range when conducting naval bombardment missions. It also allowed the guns to be used as makeshift anti-aircraft weapons.

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of weaponry, this reflected the increased danger of operating close to enemy-controlled shores or riverbanks. When their armament was found wanting, additional ordnance was fitted. For instance, during the war several M-class monitors received a range of additional anti-aircraft weaponry, which reflected the growing risk posed by enemy air attacks. So, as befitted the changing role of gunboats during the war and the range of tasks they were called upon to perform, not only were they usually well enough armed, their powerful main armament made them extremely useful in the theatres in which they fought.

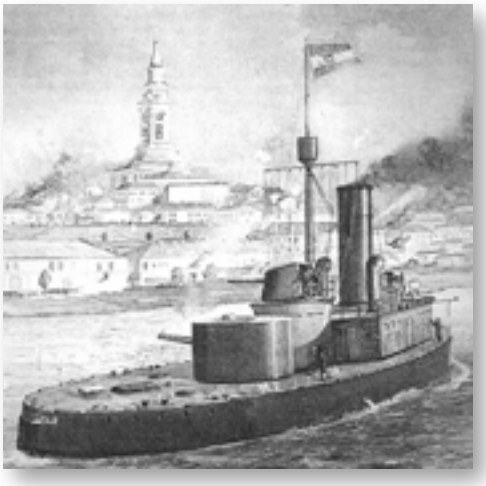
GUNBOATS IN ACTION

The effectiveness of gunboats during World War I is best demonstrated by taking a brief look at their performance in action, in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. While gunboats had an important role to play elsewhere – for instance while patrolling in the Caribbean or the Far East, it was in these key theatres that they played the greatest role in the conflict.

Europe

In August 1914 the German army advanced rapidly through Belgium and reached the coast of the English Channel. In order to slow their advance, British gunboats and monitors were despatched to the Belgian coast to bombard German troops occupying Ostend. As the Royal Navy lacked light monitors, old Ant-class 'flat-iron' gunboats were brought back into service and sent to silence the German shore batteries being set up around the Belgian port. In particular the flat-irons were called upon to lay down a curtain of fire to protect Nieuport, which was under attack by overwhelming numbers of German troops. Although the town was lost, the German attacks were eventually stalled thanks to this curtain of heavy fire. Though the three Humber-class monitors arrived too late to join in the bombardment, this naval intervention helped secure the seaward flank of the Western Front – a flank that remained largely static until 1918.

A depiction of the Austro-Hungarian river monitor SMS *Körös* shelling the Serbian capital of Belgrade, during the final stages of the Austrian assault on the city in early October 1915. The gunboat is shown operating on the river Sava near the site of the modern day Branko's Bridge, where the town is dominated by the 19th century spire of St Michael's Cathedral.



While the old Ant-class gunboats were returned to harbour service, the new breed of light monitors replaced them, and *M24*, *M25*, *M26* and *M27* became stalwarts of the Dover Patrol. They spent their war operating off the Belgian coast, from the front line to just east of Zeebrugge, engaging enemy shore batteries, firing into harbours and generally harassing the German defences in the area. By early 1917 they were joined by *M21*, *M22* and *M23*, which participated in the mass bombardment of Zeebrugge that May.

On the far side of Europe the Austro-Hungarian Danube Flotilla was also thrust into the fight from the very start of the war. The river Danube ran through the heartland of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but it then continued on through Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria before it reached the Black Sea. On 28 July 1914, when Austria declared war on Serbia, the river became a front line, and the flotilla was thrust into the campaign from the very start. On 4 August, *Körös* was hit repeatedly while

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duelling with a Serb gun battery, and a month later *Leitha* was badly damaged and her guns silenced during a similar duel. In October, *Temes* hit a mine and sank, but was later salvaged and was back in commission by 1917. The Serbs repulsed four large-scale offensives, but the monitors played their part by bombarding the Serbian capital of Belgrade and preventing Serbian counter-attacks across the river Sava, which entered the Danube just above the city.

The main gun turret of the Austro-Hungarian river gunboat SMS *Enns*, photographed firing at Romanian shore batteries during the Austrian assault on Romanian positions on the south bank of the Danube near Bucharest in late September 1916. The turret was armed with two 12cm (4.7in) guns.

The monitors continued to dominate the river for several months, until a new offensive was undertaken in the autumn of 1915. Belgrade was captured in early October, and the remnants of the Serb army withdrew southwards, away from the river. The Austrian river monitors had played a vital part in securing this victory. In August 1916 Romania entered the war on the Allied side, and so the Danube flotilla went into action again, supporting Austrian and German drives down the river towards Bucharest. Russian reinforcements and Allied weapons helped stall the offensive, and the fighting reached a stalemate in early 1917. During the Romanian campaign, *Körös* was badly damaged again, while *Inn* was sunk when she struck a Romanian mine. The monitor was salvaged, but was still not back in service by the time the war came to an end.

In December 1917 Austria-Hungary and Germany signed an armistice with Romania, and the flotilla steamed down the Danube to the Black Sea. It continued on to Odessa, which it garrisoned in April 1918. From there it patrolled the rivers Bug and Dniepr, before the war finally came to an end, and the flotilla was recalled to Budapest. It was finally disbanded in November 1918, whereupon its surviving vessels surrendered to the Allies. They were guarded by the British gunboats *Aphis* and *Ladybird*, which were sent up the Danube to receive their surrender. Most of these remaining monitors were subsequently handed over to the newly created Yugoslav navy.

The Insect-class gunboat HMS *Cockchafer* looks somewhat dilapidated in this photograph of her undergoing repairs in a makeshift tidal dry dock on the banks of the Northern Dvina. The picture was taken in Archangel during the early summer of 1919, during the Allied campaign against the Bolsheviks in northern Russia.

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HMS *Britomart* was a Bramble-class gunboat – the sister ship of *Dwarf*, which saw action off German West Africa in November 1914. Unusually for British seagoing gunboats, these Bramble-class vessels were built from steel rather than wood over metal frames. Strangely, they lacked any wireless facilities until after the outbreak of the war.

While this was taking place at Belgrade, thousands of miles to the north British gunboats and light monitors were converging on northern Russia as part of an Allied move to support the White Army during the Russian Civil War. From June 1918 until March 1920, Allied expeditionary forces battled with the Red Army in the forests to the south of Archangel. Control of the rivers Dvina, Vaga, Onega and Yomtsa were vital in order to move in this inhospitable region, and so a number of Fly- and Insect-class gunboats and M-class monitors were sent to Russia to support the Allied troops. *M25* sank a small Russian gunboat on her first patrol, while in early 1919 a monitor flotilla consisting of *Humber*, *M27*, *M31* and *M33* battled other Russian gunboats and gun batteries during a drive up the Northern Dvina. Fly- and Insect-class gunboats proved their worth too – *Cicala* and *Cricket* sank a Bolshevik floating gun battery, and battled enemy mines and gun batteries.

Eventually, the collapse of the White forces in the area necessitated a retreat. *M25* and *M27* were cut off by falling river levels and had to be scuttled and abandoned as the Allies withdrew. *Glowworm* was also badly damaged by an ammunition explosion in the river port of Bereznik. So, it was with mixed feelings that the gunboats and monitors returned home, their crews having failed in their mission, but delighted to finally have the chance to bring their long wartime service to an end.

Africa

World War I also saw the Bramble-class gunboat HMS *Dwarf* thrust into action from the start. In early August 1914 she was in Gibraltar, completing a refit, when she was ordered to the West African coast. By mid August she was in Sierra Leone, where a British force was preparing to seize the German West African colonies of Togoland and the Cameroons. On the 24th she sailed in company with the cruiser *Cumberland*, and four days later she was off Lomé, in Togoland. The occupation of the colony had been almost bloodless, and her guns remained silent. She put into the Nigerian port of Lagos to take on coal, and then continued south to Duala (now Douala) in the Cameroons ('Kamarun' in German). On 4 September *Dwarf* and *Cumberland* dropped anchor in Ambas Bay, but a landing was cancelled as the amphibious force was too disorganised. It went ahead two days later, and on 9 September *Dwarf* sailed up the river Cameroon (now the Wouri) towards Duala itself.

There she encountered the German auxiliary gunboat *Herzog Elizabeth*, which she hit with a 4in shell. The German gunboat limped away, but *Dwarf* was unable to follow, as blockships, mines and gun batteries protected the river mouth. On 11 September she engaged the battery, but withdrew when

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a German shell exploded beneath *Dwarf*'s bridge. Next she thwarted a German attempt to sink the gunboat using the launches filled with homemade bombs. *Dwarf*'s searchlights detected them, and they were driven off. Finally, just before midnight on 16 September *Dwarf* was attacked by the German gunboat *Nachtigal*. She was illuminated by searchlights and riddled with shot, but *Nachtigal* still managed to ram into *Dwarf* before drifting away and blowing up. Duala surrendered two weeks later.

Seven months later on the far side of Africa, the light monitors *Mersey* and *Severn* entered the Rufiji Delta in an attempt to sink the German light cruiser *Königsberg*. The German cruiser had been trapped in the Rufiji by British cruisers, but they were unable to pursue her upriver. So the two monitors were sent out from Britain, and on 6 July 1915 they began their attack, using aircraft to direct their fire. The Germans used a spotter too, as the mangrove-lined banks of the twisting river blocked line of sight. Eventually the monitors withdrew after *Severn* was hit twice. Five days later they tried again, and managed to silence the cruiser in a gunnery duel that lasted for five hours. By its end *Königsberg* had settled on the bottom of the river and was abandoned, but not before her guns were removed, to be used elsewhere in German East Africa.

One of the recipients was the *Graf von Götzen*, an auxiliary gunboat that dominated the landlocked waters of Lake Tanganyika. She was a passenger vessel that had been converted into a stately gunboat, and together with her smaller consorts *Kingani* and *Hedwig von Wissmann* she protected the western borders of German East Africa. When these vessels started bombarding lakeside settlements in British Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo it was decided that the Allies needed to do something to regain control of the lake. The eccentric Lieutenant-Commander Spicer-Simpson was given command of two motor gunboats, which were transported from Britain to South Africa. From there their journey continued by rail, river or by land, dragged across the bush by teams of oxen. They finally reached the shores of Lake Tanganyika in late October 1915.

By now Spicer-Simpson's little gunboats had been given names – *Mimi* and *Toutou* (French for 'miaow' and 'bow wow' respectively). They were each armed with a 3-pdr Hotchkiss forward and a Maxim machine gun aft. On 22 December they were launched on the lake, and two days later they attacked and captured the *Kingani*, after her only gun was disabled. She was rearmed with a 12-pdr, renamed *Fifi* and added to Spicer-Simpson's little squadron. On 9 February 1916 it was the turn of the *Hedwig von Wissmann*, which was attacked by *Mimi* and *Fifi* accompanied by a lightly armed Belgian auxiliary. After a running battle, a shell from *Fifi* hit the German gunboat's engine room, and she was scuttled by her crew. Spicer-Simpson never got the chance to take on the much larger gunboat *Graf von Götzen* – she was damaged by Belgian aircraft, and scuttled on 26 July to avoid capture.

The Middle East

The entry of Turkey into the war posed problems for the Allies, as it severed their Black Sea links with Russia. In April 1915 Allied troops landed in Gallipoli in an attempt to force the Dardanelles and the sea approaches to the Bosporus and the Black Sea. The campaign soon degenerated into a bloody stalemate, as the Allies suffered heavy casualties and made almost no territorial gains. Monitors of various sizes were despatched to Gallipoli and,

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A Fly-class river gunboat – in this case HMS *Firefly* – is pictured berthed alongside an Insect-class river gunboat moored on the river Tigris near Baghdad in early 1917. When this photograph was taken *Firefly* had only just been recaptured from the Turks, and was undergoing repairs. She is pictured flying a white ensign.

by the summer, ten batch 1 M-class light monitors, all six batch 2 variants and the *Humber* were operating off the peninsula, providing naval bombardment support for the Allied troops. They also shelled Bulgarian railway installations, as part of an unsuccessful attempt to prevent the country siding with the Turks.

After the Allied withdrawal from Gallipoli, several of the light monitors served as gunboats, patrolling the Aegean, before some moved on to the coast of Palestine. There they supported the British advance from Egypt by shelling Turkish ports and coastal batteries. In October 1917 *M15* was torpedoed and sunk off Gaza, while two months later *M28* was sunk off the Dardanelles during a sortie by the German battlecruiser *Goeben*. These, though, were small-scale operations compared to the naval effort designed to support the British campaign against the Turks in Mesopotamia.

In November 1914 British troops landed to protect the installations of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company around Abadan and Basra, where the Shatt-al-Arab waterway enters the Persian Gulf. The landings were supported by the guns of the Cadmus-class gunboats *Espiègle* and *Odin*. At this stage of the campaign Turkish resistance was minimal. The following summer the British began an advance up the river Tigris towards the Turkish stronghold of Kut. From there the plan was to continue on to Baghdad. The two gunboats were joined by their sister ship *Clio* as they pushed up the river as far as Kut. The town fell, and by November the British had reached Ctesiphon, outside Baghdad.

D

THE BATTLE OF LAKE TANGANYIKA, 1916

On the morning of 9 February 1916, Lieutenant Odebrecht commanding the small gunboat SMS *Hedwig von Wissmann* left his night-time anchorage on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika, and set a course towards the small port of Albertville, on the Belgian Congo side of the long narrow lake. At 7.45am he spotted a launch approaching, accompanied by the even smaller German gunboat SMS *Kingani*, which was flying a British ensign. Realising that *Kingani* had been captured, Odebrecht turned away, hoping to lure them up the lake, towards the larger gunboat *Graf von Götzen*. The armed motor launch was HMS *Mimi*, and she and *Kingani* (now renamed *Fifi*) immediately gave chase. *Mimi* kept her distance and began firing at the *Wissmann*, until Odebrecht turned so his larger bow gun could bear on her pursuer. The two craft exchanged fire without hitting each other, but this allowed the slower *Fifi* to catch up and join in the action with her bow-mounted 12-pdr. She hit the German gunboat twice, her last shot piercing *Wissmann*'s boiler. With *Wissmann* dead in the water, Odebrecht ordered the survivors to abandon ship, and then scuttled the gunboat. This plate shows *Mimi* pursuing the *Hedwig von Wissmann* as the turning gunboat tries to clear the arc of her bow-mounted 4.7cm gun.

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HMS *Sedgefly*, pictured here in the first of two photographs showing her coming into action on the Euphrates in September 1917. Her gun crews are already closed up for action. A lookout platform has been fitted above the searchlight platform, where an officer manning a Barr & Stroud rangefinder is preparing to direct the fire of the gunboat.

Turkish resistance had strengthened, and a breakthrough proved impossible. Running short of supplies, the British withdrew back to Kut, pursued by a much larger Turkish army. Newly arrived Fly-class gunboats did what they could to support the withdrawal, but *Firefly* was damaged, abandoned and captured during the retreat. Kut was besieged, and in April 1916 it fell to the Turks. During the several attempts to lift the siege, the Fly-class gunboats provided naval bombardment support to the relief force. However, they were unable to save the garrison. The British regrouped, and a fresh offensive was launched in December. This time the Fly-class gunboats were joined by the first of the larger Insect-class vessels. *Mantis*, *Moth* and *Tarantula*, plus *Butterfly*, *Gadfly* and *Snakefly* eventually fought their way upriver to reach Kut.

It was recaptured in late February, and the advance on Baghdad began. The Insect-class gunboats proved invaluable, preventing the Turks from using the river as an avenue of retreat. On 11 March 1917 the British entered Baghdad, led by the six gunboats mentioned above, who recaptured *Firefly*, which had been flying Turkish colours for 16 months. What remained of the Turkish army withdrew to Mosul, and the campaign fizzled out, as the British diverted what troops they could to Palestine. British gunboats played a major part in this campaign, as the river was the only viable avenue into Mesopotamia, and their firepower proved vital in securing control of the waterway. While some of them saw further action off Palestine, the campaign on the Tigris demonstrated just how effective these small gunboats could be.

GUNBOAT SPECIFICATIONS

It is impractical to list all of the gunboats of all nations in service during World War I. Instead, this section presents a selection of the more important gunboats and gunboat classes, including those vessels that took an active role in the conflict. In two cases, details are provided for Turkish and British motor launches – vessels that were too small to be classed as gunboats, but which are included to complete the picture of the naval forces ranged against gunboats on Lake Tanganyika and the river Tigris.

In this view of HMS *Sedgefly*, the gunboat is moored to the left (north) bank of the Euphrates, secured by two cables, while local labourers drive in stakes to provide a more secure lodgement. Her 4in gun is already in action, firing at Turkish targets to the north of the mooring position.

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Austria-Hungary

Maros-class river monitors	
Vessels in class	2 (*Maros, Leitha*)
Displacement	310 tons (standard)
Length	165ft 9in (50.5m)
Beam	28ft 4in (8.65m)
Draught	4ft 3in (1.3m)
Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (1,150shp)
Speed	9½ knots
Armament	Two 4.7in (12cm) guns in twin turret, two machine guns
Laid Down	1871
Completed	1872
Complement	68
Notes	Until 1896 these vessels were fitted with 6in (15cm guns). They were due to be decommissioned, but were retained in service following the outbreak of World War I.

Körös-class river monitors	
Vessels in class	2 (*Körös, Szamos*)
Displacement	448 tons (standard)
Length	177ft 3in (54m)
Beam	29ft 6in (9m)
Draught	3ft 11in (1.2m)
Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (1,200shp)
Speed	10 knots
Armament	Two 4.7in (12cm) guns in single turrets, two 3in (7cm) guns in single mounts, two machine guns
Laid Down	1880
Completed	1892–94
Complement	84
Temes-class river monitors	
Vessels in class	2 (*Temes, Bodrog*)
Displacement	440 tons (standard)
Length	Temes: 197ft 10in (60.3m); *Bodrog*: 189ft 4in (57.7m)
Beam	31ft 2in (9.5m)
Draught	3ft 11in (1.2m)
Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (1,400shp)
Speed	13 knots

The Austro-Hungarian river monitor SMS *Bodrog*, pictured moored on the banks of the river Sava, shortly after the Austrian army crossed the river in August 1914 in its failed attempt to capture Belgrade. The presence of these monitors on the river protected the Austrians from Serbian counter-attacks during the campaign.

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Armament	Three 4.7in (12cm) guns in two single turrets, and a single mount, two 1.5in (3.7cm) guns in single mounts, one machine gun
Laid Down	1903
Completed	1904–05
Complement	89
Note	*Bodrog* ran aground in October 1918, and was subsequently interned by the Yugoslav government.

Enns-class river monitors	
Vessels in class	2 (*Enns*, *Inn*)
Displacement	540 tons (standard)
Length	189ft 11in (57.9m)
Beam	33ft 9in (10.3m)
Draught	4ft 3in (1.3m)
Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (1,500shp)
Speed	13 knots
Armament	Three 4.7in (12cm) guns in a twin turret and single turret, six machine guns
Laid Down	1912
Completed	1914
Complement	95

Germany

Iltis-class gunboats	
Vessels in class	6 (*Eber, Iltis, Jaguar, Luchs, Panther, Tiger*)
Displacement	1,031 tons (standard); *Tiger, Luchs*: 1,090 tons; *Panther, Eber*: 1,193 tons
Length	214ft 1in (65.2m) (standard); *Panther, Eber*: 219ft 6in (66.9m)
Beam	19ft 11in (9.1m) (standard); *Panther, Eber*: 31ft 10in (9.7m)
Draught	11ft 11in (3.6m); *Panther, Eber*: 10ft 3in (3.1m)
Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (1,400shp); *Panther, Eber*: 1,300shp
Speed	14½ knots; *Panther, Eber:* 14 knots
Armament	Two 10.5cm (4.1in) guns in single mounts, six machine guns
Laid Down	1900–02
Completed	1902–03
Complement	130
Notes	*Iltis* and *Jaguar* had 8.8cm rather than 10.5cm guns fitted. *Iltis*, *Jaguar, Luchs* and *Tiger* were all sunk in action between September and November 1914. *Eber* was scuttled in October 1917.

***Graf von Götzen* auxiliary gunboat**	
Vessels in class	1
Displacement	1,575 tons (standard)

E

HMS *FIREFLY* IN ACTION ON THE TIGRIS, 1915

The Fly-class gunboat HMS *Firefly* accompanied the British advance on Baghdad in late 1915, and provided naval bombardment support during the battle of Ctesiphon (22–25 November), fought just outside Baghdad. Realising that he lacked the troops and supplies he needed to defeat the Turks, General Townsend decided to withdraw back to Kut. *Firefly* helped cover the retreat. On the evening of 30 November, Lieutenant Eddis RM moored *Firefly* for the night on the left (east) bank of the Tigris, close to the army's encampment at Um-al-Tabul, a locality some 12 miles south of Aziziyah. Dawn revealed that the Turkish 44th Regiment had arrived during the night, and soon Turkish mountain guns were firing at *Firefly* and the paddlewheel tug *Comet*. They slipped their moorings and fired back, until at 7.00am the order came to withdraw downstream. At that moment a shell hit *Firefly*'s boiler, and she was rendered helpless. *Comet* tried to tow her to safety, but the tug was hit, the gunboat ran aground, and the attempt had to be abandoned. While *Firefly*'s crew were rescued by another tug, the gunboat had to be left behind. She was soon repaired, re-armed and renamed the *Selmanpak* by the Turkish Navy. This plate shows *Firefly* in action, shortly before she received her disabling boiler hit.

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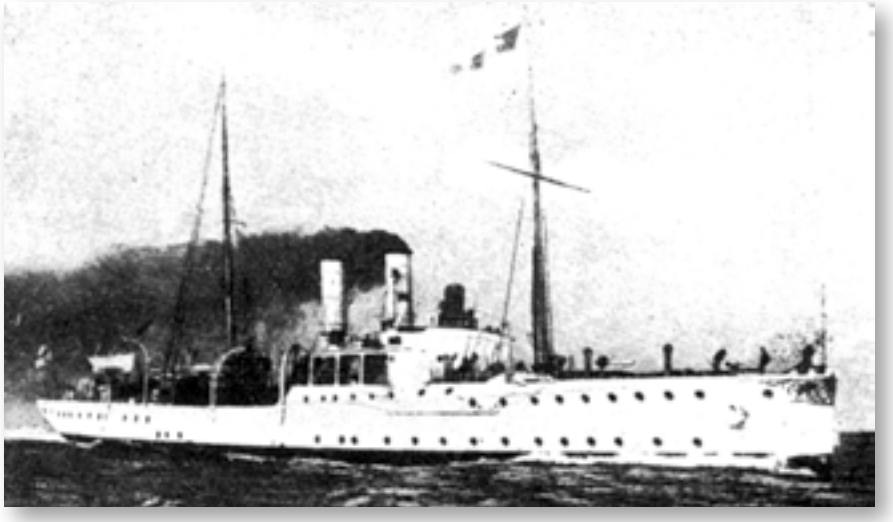
The German gunboat SMS *Panther* entered the history books in April 1911 when she played a prominent part in the 'Agadir Crisis', in which the German use of gunboat diplomacy alarmed the British and French, both of whom had interests in Morocco. In 1914 she was removed from active service, and saw out the war as an accommodation ship. None of her five sister ships survived the war, four of them being sunk before the end of 1914.



Length	234ft 3in (71.4m)
Beam	32ft 6in (9.9m)
Draught	9ft 9in (3m)
Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (500shp)
Speed	11 knots
Armament	One 10.5cm (4.1in) gun, one 8.8cm (3.5in) gun, two 3.7cm revolving guns in single mounts.
Laid Down	1913
Completed	February 1915, when she was commissioned as an auxiliary gunboat
Complement	64
Notes	In May 1916 all of her guns were removed, apart from one 3.7cm revolving gun. *Graf von Götzen* was scuttled in Lake Tanganyika on 26 July 1916. She was subsequently raised, and remains in service as the passenger ferry MV *Liemba*.

***Hedwig von Wissmann* auxiliary gunboat**	
Vessels in class	1
Displacement	60 tons (standard)
Length	66ft (20m)
Beam	14ft (4.26m)
Draught	4ft 1in (1.25m)
Propulsion	Single-screwed, steam propulsion (85shp)
Speed	9 knots
Armament	One 4.7cm (1.9in) gun, one 3.7cm revolving gun
Laid Down	1899
Completed	1905 (commissioned as an auxiliary gunboat in November 1914)
Complement	28
Note	*Hedwig von Wissmann* was sunk in action on Lake Tanganyika on 9 February 1916.

***Kingani auxiliary* gunboat**	
Vessels in class	1
Displacement	45 tons (standard)
Length	58ft 3in (17.75m)
Beam	12ft (3.65m)
Draught	4ft 3in (1.3m)
Propulsion	Single-screwed, steam propulsion (85.5shp)
Speed	9½ knots
Armament	One 3.7cm revolving gun
Laid Down	1893

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Completed	1894 (commissioned as an auxiliary gunboat in November 1914)
Complement	8
Notes	*Kingani* was captured on Lake Tanganyika on 26 December 1915. She was repaired and renamed HMS *Fifi*.

***Nachtigal* auxiliary gunboat**	
Vessels in class	1
Displacement	440 tons (standard)
Length	140ft 9in (42.9m)
Beam	26ft 1in (8.2m)
Draught	8ft 6in (2.6m)
Propulsion	Single-screwed, steam propulsion (shp unknown)
Speed	10 knots
Armament	One 5cm gun, one 3.7cm revolving gun
Laid Down	1894
Completed	1895
Complement	36
Notes	*Nachtigal* was a German government steamer, and was converted into an auxiliary gunboat in August 1914. She was sunk off Duala in the Cameroons on 16 September 1914.

Great Britain

Cadmus-class gunboats	
Vessels in class	5 (*Cadmus*, *Clio, Espiègle*, *Merlin*, *Odin*)
Displacement	1,070 tons (fully laden)
Length	185ft (56.4m)
Beam	33ft (10m)
Draught	11ft 3in (3.4m)
Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (1,400shp)
Speed	13 knots
Armament	Six 4in guns in single mounts, four 3-pdrs in single mounts, 3 machine guns
Laid Down	1899–1902
Completed	1902–04
Complement	120
Notes	These were steel-hulled vessels, with three masts. Originally there were six vessels in this class, but by 1914 *Fantome* was no longer in active service.

Bramble-class gunboats	
Vessels in class	4 (*Bramble*, *Britomart*, *Dwarf*, *Thistle*)
Displacement	710 tons (fully laden)
Length	180ft (54.9m)
Beam	33ft (10.1m)
Draught	8ft (2.4m)
Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (1,300shp)
Speed	13 knots
Armament	Two 4in guns in single turrets, four 12-pdrs in single mounts
Laid Down	1898–89
Completed	1899–1901
Complement	85
Note	These were steel-hulled vessels, with two masts.

Humber-class monitors	
Vessels in class	3 (*Severn*, *Humber*, *Mersey*)
Displacement	1,520 tons (fully laden)
Length	266ft 9in (81.3m)
Beam	49ft (14.9m)
Draught	5ft 8in (1.7m)

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Like her five sister ships, the light monitor *M29* was built in the Harland & Wolff shipyard in Belfast, entering service in the summer of 1915. She was sent to the Mediterranean, serving as a gunboat off the coast of Palestine, before supporting the British during the battle of Jaffa (1917) and during their subsequent drive up the Mediterranean coast. She is pictured here berthed in Jaffa harbour.

Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (1,450shp)
Speed	9½ knots
Armament	Two 6in/50 guns in a single twin turret, two 4.7in howitzers in single mounts, four 3-pdrs in single mounts, six machine guns
Laid Down	All in August 1912
Completed	November 1913 to February 1914
Complement	85

M-class monitors (batch 1)	
Vessels in class	14 (*M15* to *M28*)
Displacement	650 tons (fully laden)
Length	177ft 3in (54m)
Beam	31ft (9.4m)
Draught	7ft (2.1m) maximum
Propulsion	Four-screwed, diesel propulsion (6,400shp)
Speed	11 knots
Armament	One 9.2in/46 gun in a single turret, one 12-pdr, one 6-pdr
Laid Down	All in March 1915

F

HMS *SEDGEFLY*

The first of the newly commissioned Fly-class river gunboats arrived in Mesopotamia in time to support the initial British advance up the river Tigris towards Baghdad. However, *Sedgefly* was late to arrive, being part of the second batch of these gunboats to be built. Like the first batch, these vessels were all built at the Yarrow shipyard on the river Clyde. *Sedgefly* joined the Tigris flotilla in late March 1917, after the fall of Baghdad. However, she saw action during operations farther up the Tigris and the Euphrates, when British forces advanced on Ramadiya and Mosul, securing the final defeat of the Turkish army in Mesopotamia. This view of *Sedgefly* shows her with her awnings removed, but with their framework still in place over her superstructure.

HMS *MANTIS*

One of the first Insect-class gunboats to join the Tigris flotilla was HMS *Mantis*, having been towed there from Britain. She first saw action in March 1916, during the second unsuccessful attempt to relieve the beleaguered British garrison at Kut. She fired more naval bombardment missions in support of a third attempt the following month, but once again the Turkish lines held, and Kut fell on 29 April. *Mantis* returned to Kut in February 1917, and her guns played an important part in the recapture of the town. The gunboat continued to spearhead the riverine advance up the Tigris, until Baghdad finally fell to the British on 8 March. This view shows her as she looked during this final drive on Kut and Baghdad.

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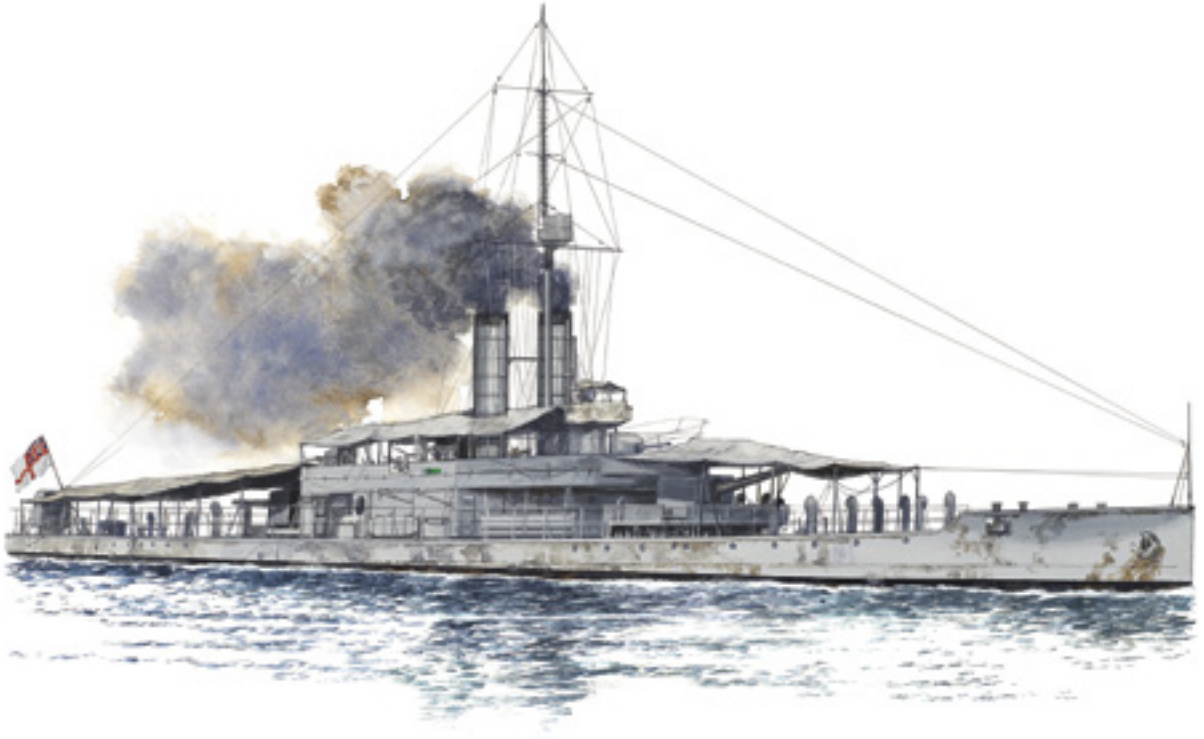

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When the Fly-class gunboat HMS *Firefly* was captured in November 1915 she was repaired, and renamed the *Selmanpak*. She was used to defend Baghdad in early 1917, when she was damaged in the fighting, and recaptured by the British. Some of her former British officers found their old possessions still aboard her.

Completed	June to October 1915
Complement	69
Notes	*M21*, *M23*, *M24* and *M25* carried 7.5in main guns; *M26* and *M27* carried 6in ones. In 1917 *M26* was refitted with a 7.5in gun. *M23*, *M24*, *M26* and *M27* also received two additional 2-pdr 'pom-poms', while all surviving vessels received a single 3in anti-aircraft gun. *M15* was torpedoed and sunk in November 1917. *M21* was mined and sunk in October 1918. *M28* was sunk in action in January 1918. *M25* and *M27* were scuttled in September 1919.

M-class monitors (batch 2)	
Vessels in class	5 (*M29* to *M33*)
Displacement	580 tons (fully laden)
Length	177ft 3in (54m)
Beam	31ft (9.4m)
Draught	5ft 11in (1.8m)
Propulsion	Two-screwed, steam propulsion (4,000shp)
Speed	9 knots
Armament	Two 6in/45 guns in two single turrets, one 6-pdr
Laid Down	All in March 1915
Completed	June to July 1915
Complement	69
Notes	*M30* was sunk in action in May 1916. *M33* survives as a historic ship, based in Portsmouth, UK.

Fly-class river gunboats	
Vessels in class	16 (*Blackfly*, *Butterfly*, *Caddisfly*, *Cranefly*, *Dragonfly*, *Firefly*, *Gadfly*, *Grayfly*, *Greenfly*, *Hoverfly*, *Mayfly*, *Sawfly*, *Sedgefly*, *Snakefly*, *Stonefly*, *Waterfly*)
Displacement	98 tons (standard)
Length	126ft (38.4m)
Beam	20ft (6.1m)
Draught	2ft (0.6m)
Propulsion	Single-screwed, steam propulsion (175shp)
Speed	9½ knots
Armament	One 4in single turret, one 12-pdr, one 6-pdr, one 3-pdr, one 2-pdr 'pom-pom', four or more machine guns
Laid Down	February to December 1915
Completed	July 1915 to September 1916
Complement	22
Note	*Firefly* was captured by the Turks in December 1915, and recaptured in February 1917.

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Insect-class river gunboats	
Vessels in class	12 (*Aphis*, *Bee*, *Cicala*, *Cockchafer*, *Cricket*, *Glowworm*, *Gnat*, *Ladybird*, *Mantis*, *Scarab*, *Tarantula*)
Displacement	645 tons (standard)
Length	237ft 6in (72.4m)
Beam	36ft (11m)
Draught	4ft (1.2m)
Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (2,000shp)
Speed	14 knots
Armament	Two 6in/40 guns in single mounts, two 12-pdr in single mounts, six machine guns
Laid Down	February 1915 to March 1916
Completed	November 1915 to December 1916
Complement	53

Thornycroft motor launch	
Vessels in class	2 (*Mimi*, *Toutou*)
Displacement	8 tons (standard)
Length	40ft (12m)
Beam	8ft (2.44m)
Draught	5ft 8in (1.73m)
Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (200shp)
Speed	19 knots
Armament	One 3-pdr, one machine gun
Laid Down	1915
Completed	1915
Complement	6
Note	Although not gunboats, *Mimi* and *Toutou* fought two German gunboats on Lake Tanganyika.

Russia

Pulya-class river gunboat	
Vessels in class	10 (*Kope*, *Kindzhal*, *Palash*, *Pika*, *Pistolet*, *Pulya*, *Rapira*, *Sablya*, *Shashka*, *Shtyk*)
Displacement	25 tons (fully laden)
Length	72ft (22m)
Beam	10ft 6in (3.2m)
Draught	2ft 4in (0.7m)
Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (200shp)
Speed	14½ knots
Armament	One 3in (7.6cm) gun, two machine guns
Laid Down	1909
Completed	1910–11
Complement	66
Note	Some of these vessels fought against British gunboats and light monitors in the rivers of northern Russia, 1917–19.

Turkey

Marmaris gunboat	
Vessels in class	1
Displacement	531 tons (fully laden)
Length	172ft (52.4m)
Beam	24ft 7in (7.5m)
Draught	11ft 10in (3.6m)
Propulsion	Single-screwed, steam propulsion (950shp)
Speed	15 knots
Armament	Four 9-pdrs in single mounts, two 1-pdrs in single mounts, one 18in torpedo tube
Laid Down	1902

HMS *Glowworm* pictured here on patrol on the Northern Dvina in northern Russia, during the spring of 1918. She appears to be towing another craft, presumably a supply barge, which were often transported by gunboats and monitors to bring supplies up to Allied troops on the front line.

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In 1914 the Turkish gunboat *Marmaris* was responsible for guarding the Shatt-el-Arab waterway – the mouth of the river Tigris. After opposing the British landings in November 1914 she withdrew above Basra, but in June 1915 was engaged 70 miles farther upstream by the British gunboats *Espiègle* and *Clio*, and set ablaze. She ran herself aground and was abandoned. This photograph of her was taken later that day.

Completed	1904
Complement	66
Note	*Marmaris* was scuttled in the river Tigris on 2 June 1915.

***Doğan* (or *Doghan*) auxiliary river gunboat**	
Vessels in class	1
Displacement	250 tons (standard)
Length	86ft 4in (26.3m)
Beam	26ft 6in (8.1m)
Draught	4ft 8in (1.4m)
Propulsion	Single-screwed, steam propulsion (750shp)
Speed	12 knots
Armament	One 6cm gun, two machine guns
Laid Down	1912
Completed	1913 (commissioned into Turkish Navy in early 1915)
Complement	35
Notes	*Doğan* began her career as the German tug *Pionier*. She was scuttled on the river Tigris in mid March 1917.

Thornycroft motor launch	
Vessels in class	6 (Designated 'Motor Gun Launches 1N6' by Turkish Navy)
Displacement	120 tons (standard)
Length	60ft (18.3m)

G

HMS *M33*

Admiral Fisher ordered the building of several classes of large monitors in 1915, to support a planned amphibious landing on the German coast that never materialised. In addition to these monitors mounting battleship-sized guns, the Admiralty also ordered smaller shallow-draughted M-class monitors, to provide fire support as close as possible to the beachhead. While the first batch of these monitors mounted larger guns, the second batch of six vessels carried two 6in guns, mounted in a pair of single turrets. The light monitor *M33* was built in Belfast, and entered service in the summer of 1915. She saw service off Gallipoli and in the Aegean, before being sent to northern Russia in 1919, to operate on the river Dvina. *M33* survived both world wars, and is now preserved as a historic ship, based in Portsmouth.

USS *DOLPHIN*

Although she was officially described as a despatch vessel, USS *Dolphin* was the first ship of the 'New Navy', and the forerunner of a successful series of American patrol gunboats, which entered service between 1885 and 1900. She also served as a gunboat herself, and saw action during the Spanish-American War (1898). In April 1914 *Dolphin* was involved in the 'Tampico Affair', when US sailors were arrested by Mexican *federales*. This led directly to the American occupation of Vera Cruz. *Dolphin* resumed her duties as a gunboat, and was present at the US occupation of Santo Domingo in 1916. After the United States' entry into the war she patrolled the Caribbean until the end of hostilities. This elegant little vessel was a useful advocate of US gunboat diplomacy during her lengthy career. She was finally decommissioned in 1921.

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Beam	11ft (3.4m)
Draught	2ft 8in (0.8m)
Propulsion	Single-screwed, steam propulsion (80shp)
Speed	11 knots
Armament	Two 3.7cm revolving guns
Laid Down	1911
Completed	1923 (commissioned into Turkish Navy in early 1914)
Complement	6
Note	Although not gunboats, these small craft fought British gunboats on the river Tigris in 1915–17.

United States

Dolphin **gunboat/despatch vessel**	
Vessels in class	1
Displacement	1,486 tons (standard)
Length	256ft 6in (78.2m)
Beam	32ft (9.75m)
Draught	14ft 3in (4.35m)
Propulsion	Single-screwed, steam propulsion (2,255shp)
Speed	16 knots
Armament	Two 46in/50 guns, one 6-pdr, six 3-pdrs, two machine guns
Laid Down	1883
Completed	1885
Complement	152

Yorktown **gunboat**	
Vessels in class	1
Displacement	1,710 tons (standard)
Length	244ft 6in (74.5m)
Beam	36ft (11m)
Draught	14ft (4.3m)
Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (3,400shp)
Speed	16 knots
Armament	Six 6in/30 guns in single mounts, two 6-pdrs in single mounts, two 3-pdrs in single mounts, two 1-pdrs in single mounts, two machine guns
Laid Down	1887
Completed	1891
Complement	152
Note	Originally there were three gunboats in this class, but by 1914 only *Yorktown* remained in active service.

Wheeling-class gunboat	
Vessels in class	2 (*Wheeling* [PG14], *Marietta* [PG15])
Displacement	1,000 tons (standard)
Length	189ft 7in (57.8m)
Beam	34ft (10.36m)
Draught	12ft (3.66m)
Propulsion	Twin-screwed, steam propulsion (1,050shp)
Speed	13 knots
Armament	Six 6in/40 guns in single mounts, four 6-pdrs in single mounts, two 1-pdrs in single mounts, two machine guns
Laid Down	1896
Completed	1897
Complement	140

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On 24 August 1919, HMS *Glowworm* was at Bereznik on the Northern Dvina, which had served as a forward Allied supply base, and was now being dismantled. An ammunition barge caught fire, and when *Glowworm* came alongside to help, the barge exploded, killing 18 British crewmen and badly damaging the gunboat. This picture of her was taken a few weeks before the incident.

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